AFTER THE BATTLE

SAS TRAGEDY AT SENNECEY-LE-GRAND

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Front Cover: Lord Jellicoe, patron of the British SAS Regimental Association, puts flowers on the graves of the Free French SAS paratroopers who were killed in the legendary Jeep raid on Sennecey-le-Grand on September 4, 1944, and today lie buried in the municipal cemetery there. The picture was taken during the commemoration ceremony of September 4, 2002. (Jean-Pierre Garnier)

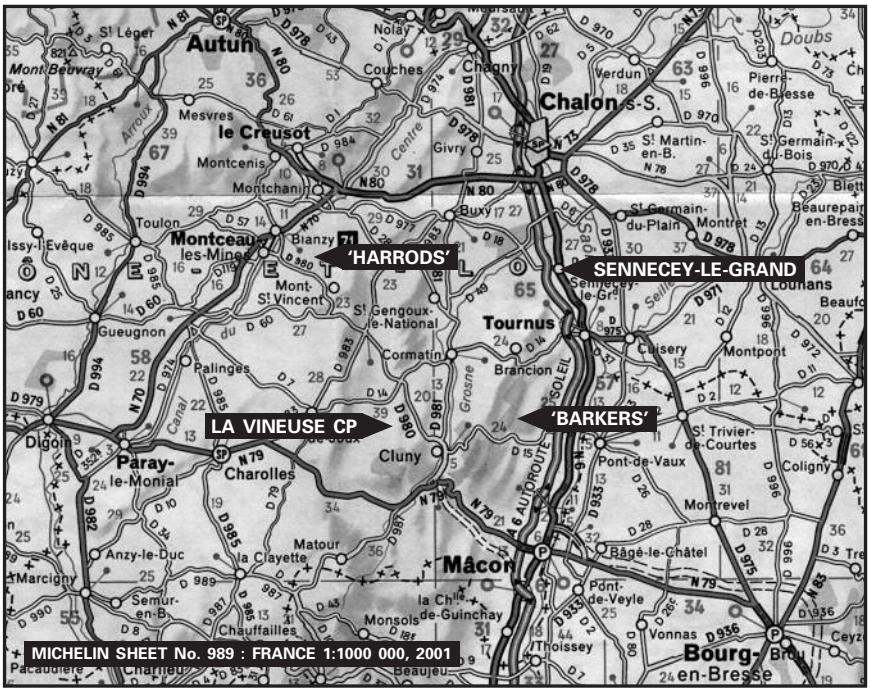
Centre Pages: Memorial to Operation 'Colin' and the part played by the 51st (Highland) Division in the liberation of southern Holland in October 1944. The memorial designed by Scottish sculptor Alan B. Herriot stands just outside Schijndel on the Schijndel--St Oedenrode road. (Karel Margry)

Back Cover: Memorial to wartime USAAF airfield Y-29 located near As in northern Belgium, from where Major George F. Preddy, ace pilot of the 352nd Fighter Group, took off on his last flight on Christmas Day 1944. (Karel Margry)

Acknowledgements: The Editor extends his appreciation to Noël Créau for making available pictures from the Amicale SAS collection for the Sennecey-le-Grand story. He would also like to thank Commandant Willy Jacobs and Kapitein Jan Coolen of the Kwartier Wevelsmoer Belgian Army Base, with special thanks to John Beaman and Ron Putz for their assistance with the George Preddy story.

Photo Credits: BA - Bundesarchiv; IWM - Imperial War Museum, London; NIOD - Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, Amsterdam.

'Green light on . . . Go! Go! Go!' Free French paratroops of the Special Air Service (SAS) making a night jump behind the lines into France from a Stirling aircraft sometime after D-Day. (IWM)



The operational area of the two SAS bases 'Harrods' and 'Barkers' in Burgundy.

In mid-August 1944, several parties of Free French paratroops of the 3ème Régiment de Chasseurs Parachutistes (3ème RCP, known to the British as the 3rd SAS) were dropped into the Burgundy region in eastern France to establish two behind-the-line bases — code-named 'Harrods' and 'Barkers' — from which they were to harass German forces in the area. Two weeks later these paratroops were reinforced by two of their own Jeep platoons who reached them after a daring and adventurous 650-kilometre overland trek from the Normandy bridgehead (Operation 'Newton'). On September 4, these SAS troops launched a co-ordinated attack on the town of Sennecey-le-Grand, an assault that involved a daring charge through the town by four of the Jeeps. The action, as epic as it was suicidal, ended in tragedy with heavy losses on both sides, but firmly established Sennecey-le-Grand as a place of legend in SAS history. The memorial which today stands at Sennecey is in fact the central memorial for all wartime SAS units, not just the Free French but the British, Belgian and Greek SAS as well.

SAS TRAGEDY AT SENNECEY-LE-GRAND

By Jean-Pierre Garnier

After the Allied landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944, several operational parties of Special Air Service (SAS) paratroops were dropped behind the German lines in various places in German-occupied France.

Created in the Libyan desert for behind-the-line operations by Captain, subsequently Lieutenant-Colonel, David Stirling in 1941, by 1944 the SAS had grown to a brigade comprising British, Free French and Free Belgian troops. The British contingent made up the 1st and 2nd SAS Regiments, the Free French the 3ème and 4ème Bataillons d'Infanterie de l'Air, redesignated the 3ème and 2ème Régiments de Chasseurs Parachutistes in March 1944 (but known colloquially to the British as '3rd SAS' and '4th SAS' respectively), and the Belgians the 5th (Independent) SAS Squadron.

The mission of the SAS troops dropped into France was to disrupt enemy communications and conduct harassing operations against German troops, either to prevent them from reinforcing the front or to delay their retreat. To do this, the SAS were to sabotage railway tracks and rolling stock, block main roads, interrupt telephone networks, deliver hit-and-run raids on enemy personnel and facilities, and so on. Whenever possible, these operations were to be carried out in co-operation with local Resistance groups.

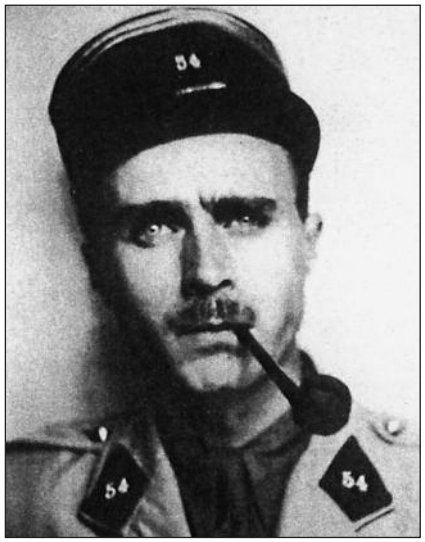
Initially, the SAS troops were primarily dropped in Brittany, but, as the Allied breakout into interior France became more imminent, SAS bases were established in regions further afield — in Poitou, Limousin, Burgundy. By mid-August 1944, there were 11 bases in operation — three of them established by British troops from the 1st SAS, the remainder by Free French from the 3ème RCP. Their strength varied from between 20 to 75 men, most bases having a strength of about 30.

Two of the French SAS bases were in the Burgundy region in mid-eastern France. When the Allies were planning Operation 'Dragoon', their landings in southern France (see *After the Battle* No. 110), they anticipated that the German 19. Armee of General der Infanterie Friedrich Wiese, which was defending the Riviera coast, would eventually retreat north along the Rhône river valley to northern Burgundy where they were expected to meet up with troops of the 1. Armee of General der Infanterie Kurt von der Chevallerie withdrawing from south-western France. Together these forces would then probably try to organise a new defence line in the Vosges mountains in order to prevent Allied forces from reaching the German border.

Allied headquarters thus planned to have SAS units operating in Burgundy to hinder the German withdrawal and delay the link-up of their forces in that area. On the night of August 12/13, and the following nights, several operational parties of the 3ème RCP were dropped in the area, seven of HQ Company and six of the 1st Company. They established two bases: 'Harrods' (45 men under Lieutenant Jean-Francois Porot), located near Montceau-les-Mines, a town about 35 kilometres south-west of Chalon-sur-Saône; and 'Barkers' (30 men under Lieutenant Hilaire Colcombet), set up some 35 miles further to the east, in the forest of Péronne, around the village of Plottes. The commander of the 3ème RCP, Commandant Pierre Château-Jobert (nom de guerre 'Conan'), established a command post at the hamlet of La Vineuse, located about midway between the two bases.

The SAS troopers joined forces with the regional FFI (French Interior Forces) under Capitaine de la Ferté ('Ferrant'). These Maquis groups, some 3,000 strong, had been organised, trained and supplied with arms drops by two SOE agents, Flight-Lieutenant Albert Brown-Bartrolli (alias 'Tiburce' or 'Toto'), who had been landed by Hudson near Angers in October 1943 with orders to set up an underground circuit in the Saône-et-Loire region, and Gabriel Chartrand ('Dieudonné') who had arrived in May 1944. From D-Day onwards, their circuit — known to SOE as 'Ditcher' — had been attacking German communications, blowing up rail and road bridges, derailing trains, and attacking road convoys. Their area of operations was the triangle formed by the towns of Macon, Paray-le-Monial and Chalon-sur-Saône.

While the men of 'Harrods' teamed up with the maquis groups of Benoît and Deprez and concentrated on the RN74 (the Paray-Chalon road), those of 'Barkers' liaised with the maquis of Cluny, Tournus, Corlay, Sennecey and Chalon, aiming their attacks on the RN7 (the Macon-Chalon road).



Capitaine Guy de Combaud-Rocquebrune, commander of the Jeep Company of the 3ème RCP who led Operation 'Newton'.

Sous-Lieutenant Charles Picard, commander of the other Jeep platoon that went to Burgundy with de Combaud's.

To increase the SAS troops' mobility and firepower, the brigade staff also planned to drop Jeeps to the SAS operational areas in France. The specially modified armed Jeeps had originally been conceived, developed, and positively tested in Libya by David Stirling and his men in co-operation with the Long Range Desert Group. Usually crewed by two men, they had proved very efficient during desert operations in attacks on Italo-German airfields. The improved version used in North-West Europe featured twin-barrelled Air Pattern Vickers machine guns with a very high cyclic rate of fire in an armoured shield, manned by the front-seat passenger, and a single-barrelled weapon in the rear. The vehicle now carried a crew of three. By 1944 the RAF had developed the technique of dropping the Jeeps by parachute (using four huge parachutes and dropping from the bomb bays of four-engined Albemarle aircraft of No. 38 Group, RAF), although the technique had yet to be tested in battle. However, in late August 1944, with one beach-head in Normandy and another in the Provence to supply for, the Allies faced a shortage of air transport, and the Jeep droppings were postponed several times.

No one was more frustrated at the delay than the commander of the Jeep Company of the 3ème RCP, Capitaine Guy de Combaud-Roquebrune. A former French cavalry officer, aged 39, and a father of six children, he had joined Britain and the SAS, together with his friend Hilaire Colcombet, escaping from France via the Spanish jails and the internment camp at Miranda del Ebro. Impatient to go, on August 14 de Combaud suggested to Brigadier Roderick McLeod, the commander of the SAS Brigade, to have his Jeep unit taken by boat to Normandy, offering to drive the 600 kilometres to Burgundy from there!

Brigadier McLeod approved the proposal: he liked the idea of an overland penetration which was much easier to set up than an airborne operation. Besides, the French captain's spirit and self-confidence were infectious. Thus Operation 'Newton' was born.

Nineteen Jeeps of the 3ème RCP's Jeep Company were soon gathered in the SAS camp at Fairford, in Gloucestershire, together with their crews: six officers and 51 other ranks. They represented five SAS platoons, four of four Jeeps and one of three. Each platoon was headed by an officer. Every Jeep was fully armed, loaded with rations for the crew for 14 days, and with a sufficient petrol supply to run 800 kilometres (500 miles) without refuelling. Each Jeep carried a No. 38 radio set; for longer-range communications, each platoon had one No. 22 set and one MCR1 receiver; to report back to SAS Headquarters at Moor Park in England, de Combaud's Jeep carried in addition a Phantom set. Every third Jeep towed a trailer.

The 'Newton' operational orders, drawn up on August 15, stipulated three different destinations for the Jeeps: one platoon (three Jeeps) under Sous-Lieutenant Jean Valayer was to go to SAS base 'Dickens', located east of Cholet in the Poitou region; two platoons (eight Jeeps) under Sous-Lieutenants Gabriel de Sablet and Henri Plowright were to go to 'Moses', south of Le Blanc in the Limousin; and two platoons (eight Jeeps), commanded by de Combaud himself and by Sous-Lieutenant Charles Picard, were assigned to 'Harrods' and 'Barkers', the two SAS bases in Burgundy.

The choice to send de Combaud himself to the Saône-et-Loire area was not made at random, for the captain was at home there. He had lived part of his youth at his uncle's, Baron Thénard, who owned a beautiful castle at La Ferté, a small village some ten kilometres south of Chalon-sur-Saône. He knew a number of people there, among them André Jarrot, alias 'Jean Goujon', one of the leaders of the Chalon Resistance, with whom he had also been in jail in Spain. Evaded to Britain in November 1942, Jarrot had been parachuted back into France — together with Raymond Basset ('Marie') — by SOE's RF Section in August 1943. The network they set up ('Armada') embarked on a long run of successful sabotage actions. Having returned to Britain in March 1944, Jarrot had arrived in France a third time in July as De Gaulle's 'Regional Military Delegate' in Saône-et-Loire.

The operational order called for all 19 Jeeps to travel south-west together, to Nantes, where the Americans had established a bridgehead across the Loire, and cross the river in that area. As soon as the leading American troops were contacted, de Combaud was, in consultation with the American commander, to make a plan for infiltration. Once through the lines, the Jeep force was to travel from one SAS base to another, dropping off platoons at their assigned places. The suggested axis of movement was: Nantes — 'Dickens' — north of Poitiers — 'Moses' — north of Limoges — 'Snelgrove' (another 3ème RCP base, north of Guéret) — south of Moulins — 'Harrods'. Orders were for the Jeeps to initially move only at night, in small numbers, and never all be on the road simultaneously. Movement had to be cautious and slow since the aim was to arrive intact at the bases before beginning offensive operations.

The Jeep force left Fairford camp on August 16. Late on the 18th, men and machines boarded an LCT to cross the Channel. They disembarked the following morning, August 19, near Courseulles, on what had been Juno Beach on D-Day. Losing no time — the Riviera landings had started on August 15, and the progress of the American and French troops up the Rhône valley was developing much quicker than anticipated — the party set off immediately, driving south via Caen and Thury-Harcourt to St Rémy, 50 kilometres inland, where they camped for the night.

Although taken during another operation and showing troops of another Free French SAS unit, this picture serves well to illustrate the type of Jeeps used by the 3éme RCP in Operation 'Newton'. The three Jeep teams shown here belonged to the 2ème RCP (also known as 4th SAS) and were pictured in a French town during Operation 'Spencer'. Launched on August 29, 1944 and terminated on September 15, 'Spencer' sent 54 Jeeps of the 2ème RCP south across the Loire to attack and harass German convoys in the Vierzon — Bourges — Sancere — Briare area and further afield. (Amicale SAS)

Next day (August 20) they continued south, travelling via Condé-sur-Noireau and Domfront to Mayenne — all territory that had already been liberated by the Americans. On the third day, they reached Evron, where de Combaud liaised with the headquarters of Lieutenant General George S. Patton's US Third Army. The next day, August 22, they drove to Laval. Here the column split up. Though the original orders called for all 19 Jeeps to stay together until after the Loire crossing at Nantes, de Combaud had already considered that such a route would make his trek to Burgundy too long, so he decided to part from the others at Laval. He would stay north of the Loire, planning to bend southward with the river beyond Orléans. So while the three platoons bound for 'Dickens' and 'Moses' headed south to cross the Loire river in the Nantes area, he and Picard went east. (Before leaving Laval, having heard that Général de Gaulle happened to be in town that day, de Combaud presented his two platoons to him.)

That day de Combaud and Picard drove some 150 kilometres, through Le Mans and ending up at Vendome, where they stayed for the night at the Château de Coucé. Lieutenant Picard recalls: 'Driving at night would have been conspicuous, so we drove at daytime, and discovered an excellent technique: on arrival at a village, we would go to the post office and ask the clerk to call her colleague in the next village or town. If she said it was all clear, we drove on. If not, we just waited for the enemy to move away. People invited us for dinner, we slept in private homes, once in a hospital and another time in a monastery with nuns! We were not even really nervous. We were young.'

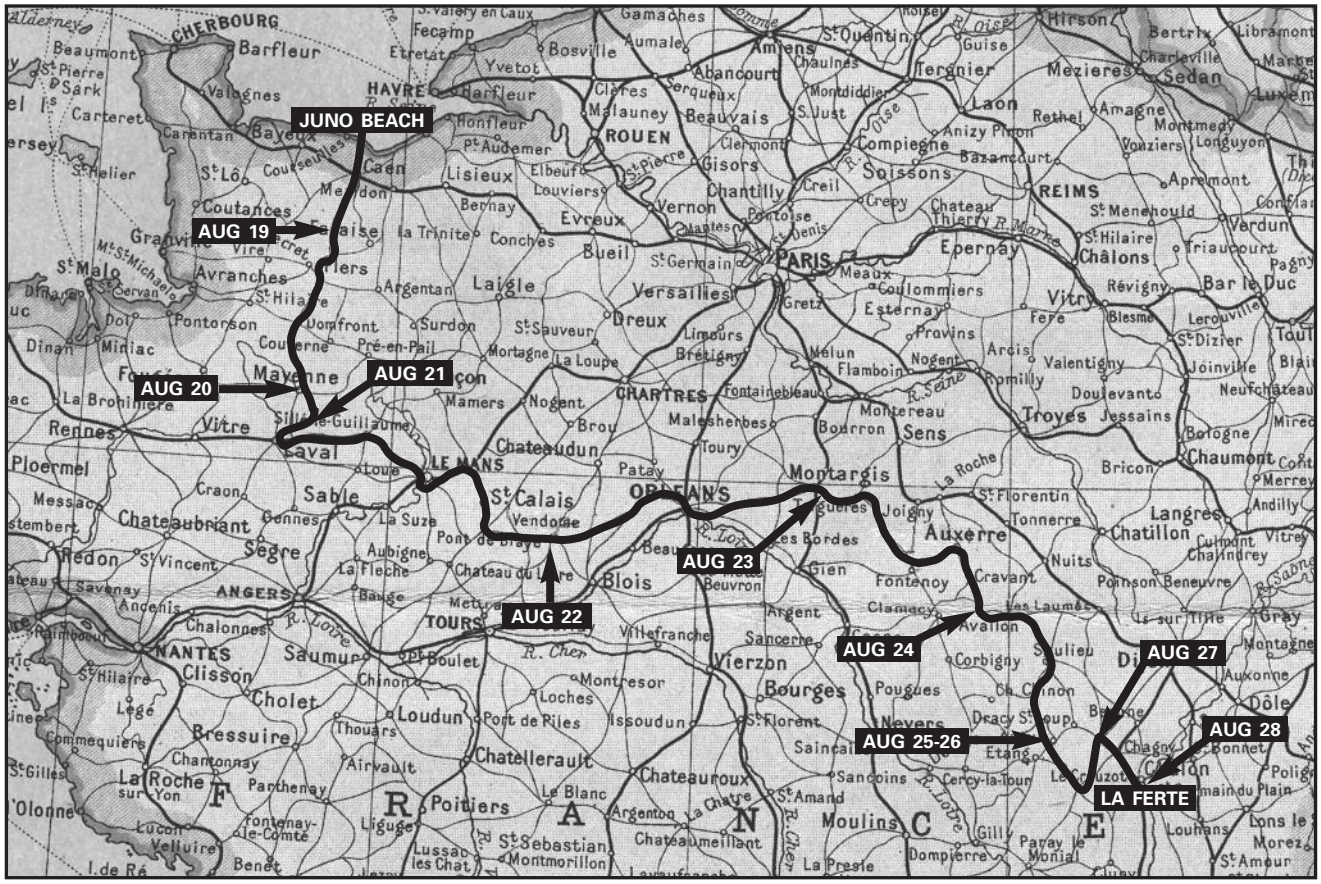
Next day, still in liberated country, they sped on through Orléans and Montargis, where they linked up with the forward units of Patton's army.

Another picture taken during Operation 'Spencer', giving a good view of the twin-barrelled Vickers machine guns carried by the SAS Jeeps. (Amicale SAS)

The following day, August 24, they left Montargis in company with an armoured reconnaissance platoon of the US 3rd Cavalry Group. Some 60 kilometres on, at the town of Aillant, the column was suddenly confronted with determined German resistance. The two SAS platoons left the Americans and managed to drive round the enemy positions. They were now behind the lines in enemy-held territory.

As they passed through the town of Auxerre, the French population came out in droves to give the Jeep party a joyous welcome. The SAS troopers had to subdue the townspeople and explain they were only passing through and that the Allied main force was still a long way away. Now on a more south-easterly course, they reached Sermizelles, where they were stopped by members of the FFI who told them that the next large town, Avallon, was at the moment occupied by German troops who were retreating through it from south-west to north-east.

The next day, August 25, with the help of the local post office lady who kept them informed about German moves, the SAS party managed to sneak through the town, passing between German columns unnoticed. As had happened at Auxerre, on seeing the SAS Jeeps, the people of Avallon were convinced they were being liberated so once again the SAS men had to dampen their enthusiasm and tell them to be patient. That night, the party stayed at the village of Larochemillay, in accommodations provided for by a Maquis group led by a British SOE officer whose second-in-command was an American downed airman.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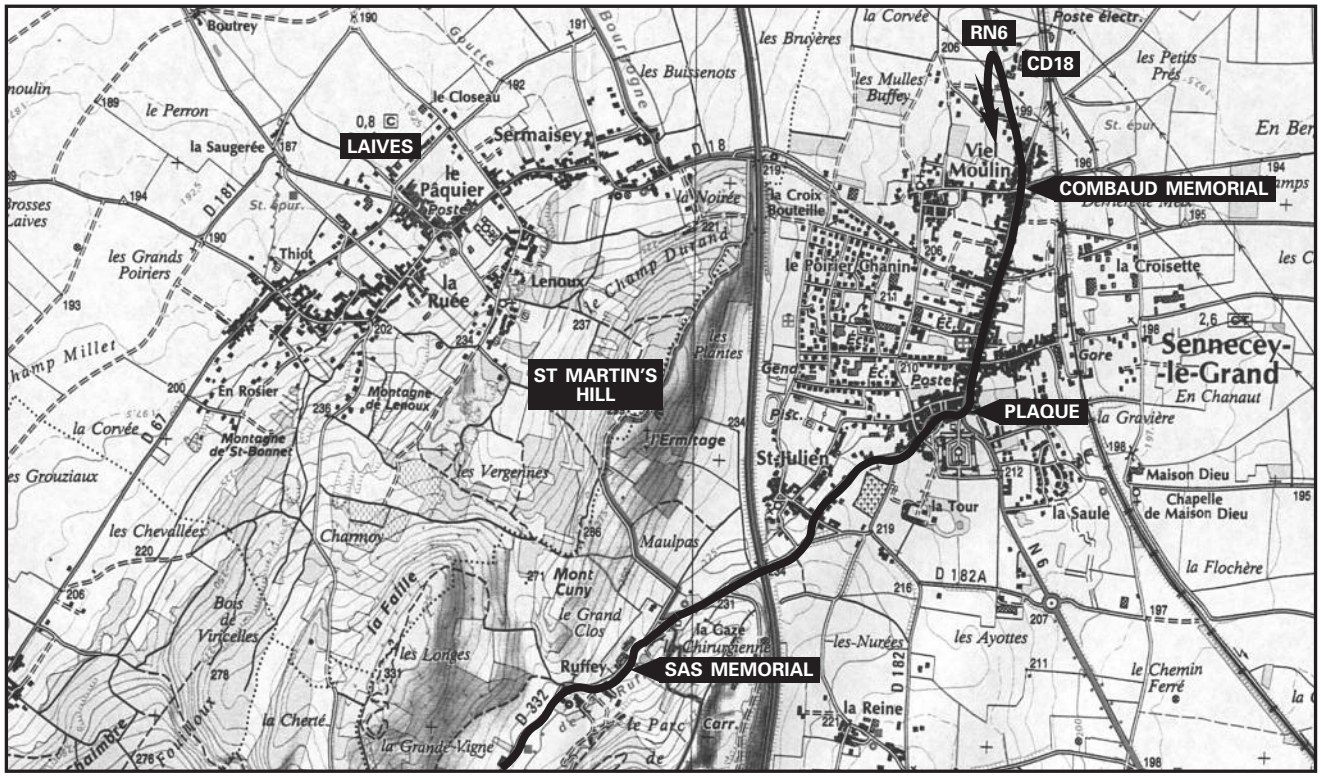


On August 28, de Combaud reached his destination — the area around Sennecey-le-Grand in northern Burgundy — the stage for his final act of September 4.

After a one-day's break among the partisans, the party continued on its way on the 27th. In order to reach their destination area, they had to cross the Canal du Centre and the railway that ran on its bank. At their first attempt, at the level crossing of Les Gratoux at La-Croix-des-Mares near Montchanin, the Jeeps ran into unexpected German fire and although the party managed to withdraw to safety, one man, Caporal Jules Lebon, had been seriously wounded. (Left in the care of some locals, he died in the hospital of Le Creusot on August 30.) Both platoons withdrew some ten kilometres to spend the night in the forest, near Antully.

Next day, August 28, they made a new attempt to cross the canal and railway, near Perreuil, and this time it went without a hitch. Soon after, the eight Jeeps entered La Ferté, the village where de Combaud had spent part of his youth, joining up with the SAS paratroopers of 'Harrods' who had been in action here for two weeks. They had reached their destination.

In ten days, De Combaud and Picard had virtually crossed France from west to east. Of some 650 kilometres travelled, at least 250 had been through enemy-held territory or no man's land. Having done so during daytime and with such a large number of vehicles was an extraordinary feat indeed.

As per his orders, de Combaud decided to split up his force. He and his platoon would stay in the La Ferté area with the 'Barkers' force and engage in operations along the RN6, the main Lyon-Dijon road which ran just three kilometres to the east. Lieutenant Picard and his four Jeeps he ordered to carry on to 'Harrods', the SAS base located near Montceau-les-Mines, some 35 kilometres further west, from where they were to assist in operations along the RN70. Picard and his men left at once.

Establishing a base for his Jeeps at the village of Tallant, De Combaud visited his relatives at the nearby Château de la Ferté and went to see his friend André Jarrot in his Maquis hide-out at the village of Corlay. On the 28th he reported to his battalion commander, Commandant Château-Jobert, at his CP in La Vineuse. There he also saw again his friend, Lieutenant Colcombet, who happened to come in to report on a successful ambush of a German column on the RN6.

Now de Combaud was ready to begin operations. On August 30, his Jeeps participated in an attack on a German convoy near the village of Serrozan on the RN6. Their 12 Vickers machine guns added considerable firepower to the attack and some 15 lorries were destroyed and an estimated 150 German soldiers killed or wounded. In reprisal, the Germans shot a number of civilians and set fire to two nearby farms.

On September 1, the SAS Jeeps joined in another attack on a convoy of marching men and horse-drawn transport. Again, the Germans were hit hard, but one paratrooper was killed, Chasseur Nguyen Ba, a colonial soldier from Indochina.

On the 3rd, a plan was hatched to launch simultaneous attacks on four towns along the RN6: (from south to north) Macon, Tournus, Sennecey-le-Grand and Chalon. The FFI and SAS commanders had received information that the American and French force coming up from the Provence had reached Lyon on the 2nd, a long time ahead of schedule. Although clearing the city centre was still in progress, the Allied vanguard had moved on and was now approaching Macon, barely 40 kilometres south of Sennecey. Attacks on the RN6 would hinder the German withdrawal and put more German troops in the bag.

All four attacks were to be carried out by the FFI; the one at Tournus would be strengthened by the SAS party under Lieutenant Colcombet; and the one at Sennecey by the parties of Capitaine Christian Boissonas and Sous-Lieutenant Jacques Zermati and by de Combaud's Jeeps.

The mayor of Sennecey had informed André Jarrot on the 3rd that a large German convoy would be forming up in town during the night for an organised withdrawal of men and equipment back to Dijon. The Germans had ordered the mayor to supply them with food for 1,000 men, and the convoy was due to hit the road at 0600 hours. (Having noticed that so far Allied aircraft had refrained from strafing and bombing convoys in inhabited areas, the Germans had made it a habit to stop in towns or villages.)

The plan was that a mixed force, composed of FFI fighters and the SAS parties of Boissonas and Zermati, would gather at dawn in the woods west of the town, at the foot of the Colline de St Martin (St Martin's Hill), and get ready for an enveloping attack. In the meantime, de Combaud's four Jeeps would assemble near the stone quarry of Ruffey, three kilometres south-west of town. From there, they would start as silently as possible, and drive through the suburb of St Julien to the southern end of Sennecey centre. Then, two abreast, the Jeeps would charge up the long and wide main street, with all 12 machine guns firing at maximum rate at the vehicles and troops on each side, the idea being to wreak as much havoc on the enemy column as possible and create maximum confusion. Once at the northern end of the main street, the Jeeps would get away by turning right at the Y-junction, north-eastward, onto the CD18, and after making a wide circle round the north via St Ambreuil, return to the west side of Sennecey and join the ground attack from St Martin's Hill.

A few hours before the attack was to go in, the plan had to be slightly altered, due to a foolish action by a few young and inexperienced Resistants. On the 2nd, an FFI party had silently occupied the village of Laives, three kilometres west of Sennecey. In the late afternoon of the 3rd, seeing three German soldiers approach from Sennecey, instead of keeping silent and unseen, the young partisans on watch at the edge of the village opened up on them from too great a distance; missed, and saw the three alarmed soldiers run back to Sennecey. The Germans reacted immediately: within the hour, their troops had attacked Laives, driven the FFI men out, taken the village and, worse, occupied St Martin's Hill.

Faced with this new situation, the SAS and FFI decided to carry on with the charge of the Jeeps as planned, but to change the start point of the infantry attack to an area further north, a far less favourable terrain, mostly flat meadows and fields which offered poor cover compared with the woods on St Martin's Hill.

At 0430 hours on September 4, the four Jeeps left their base at Tallant, a hamlet south-west of Sennecey, heading for their starting point at Ruffey. On the way, they briefly stopped in Corlay where André Jarrot was waiting for them with one of his men, André Rivot, a native of Sennecey, who would be their guide. There was no seat for him in the Jeeps, so Rivot sat on the bonnet of de Combaud's vehicle, holding on to the front Vickers mount. At Ruffey, the Jeep force formed up as follows:

Jeep No. 1, in the front left position: Capitaine Guy de Combaud-Roquebrune with one NCO, Caporal-Chef Jean-Paul Pache, and two FFI volunteers: Sous-Lieutenant Jean Magdelaine (an officer just graduated from St Cyr Military School, he had joined the Jeep column in Orléans) in the back seat, plus André Rivot on the bonnet.

Jeep No. 2, front row right: Adjudant-Chef Jacob Benhamou, Jeep leader, and two NCOs, two brothers, Sergeant Gilbert Djian and Caporal Lucien Djian, plus one FFI man, Nectoux.

Jeep No. 3, back row left: Sous-Lieutenant René Aubert-Stribi and two privates, Chasseurs 1er Classe Robert Barkatz and Roland Lombardo.

Jeep No. 4, back row right: Aspirant (Officer Candidate) Joseph Tramoni and two privates, Chasseur 1er Classe Alexis Beaude and Chasseur Bailleux.

The gunners in the Jeeps on the left-hand side were to shoot at the left side of the street, those on the right at the right side. Each of the machine guns on the Jeeps had a stock of 5,000 rounds of mixed tracer and armour-piercing ammunition.

Meanwhile, in Sennecey, the Germans were organising their convoy. All through the night new groups had unexpectedly arrived in town, and estimations are that there were between 1,500 and 3,000 Germans in Sennecey that morning. Lorries, motorcycles, horse-drawn carts, bicycles, commandeered civilian cars, all sorts of vehicles cluttered the wide main street on both sides. German soldiers were everywhere. Some were washing or shaving, others packing and getting ready for departure. Here and there an officer was giving orders for the column to form up.

The attack on Sennecey, September 4. Starting out from Tallant, the four Jeeps of de Combaud's platoon stopped at this house at Montceau-Ragny in the village of Corlay, which was a headquarters of the FFI in the area. Waiting on the steps were André Jarrot, the 'Military Delegate' for this FFI region, and André Rivot, the local guide who would show the SAS party the way into Sennecey. The latter sat on the bonnet of de Combaud's Jeep, and the convoy moved off. Today, a plaque on the house records its role in Resistance history.

No one has ever been able to establish the exact composition of the German units that were in Sennecey that morning. Charged with holding open the escape routes for the 19. Armee and 1. Armee in the Chalon sector was the 716. Infanterie-Division of the IV. Luftwaffen-Feld-Korps (part of the 19. Armee), reinforced by Kampfgruppen from the 16. Reserve-Division and the 159. Infanterie-Division of LXIV. Armeekorps (of the 1. Armee), but that does not necessarily mean that the troops at Sennecey belonged to those units. The German convoy could equally well have been made up from any of the numerous other combat formations, Luftwaffe units, and police, supply, administrative and other rear-echelon personnel that came streaming into the area from southern or south-western France during those chaotic days.

At 0700 hours de Combaud's force launched its attack. As the four Jeeps entered St Julien, contrary to what had been anticipated, the crews suddenly discovered, at a crossroads, that the Germans had posted sentries at each corner. Pressing the accelerator, de Combaud made a sharp right turn. His Jeep sped off, followed by the other three. The unexpected move threw André Rivot off the bonnet and onto the roadside. Getting up, he quickly took to his heels and made good his escape. The rush encounter took everyone by surprise. Not a single shot was fired on either side. The German sentries just stood looking, stunned and open-mouthed, without any reaction.

It was now just three kilometres to Sennecey. As they entered the suburb of St Julien, the Jeeps arrived at this crossroads where, to their surprise, the crews saw German sentries standing in the gardens all around. Reacting quickly, de Combaud, driving the lead Jeep, rapidly steered his column into the turning on the right. The Jeeps got away safely, but unfortunately they had now lost their guide, Rivot, who had been thrown off the vehicle by the unexpected turn.

With engines revving loudly, the four Jeeps rounded the church and the castle and, after a last left turn, entered the main street and started their charge. Rushing along, with all Vickers blasting away, they spat a deadly hail of bullets at the German column parked on either side of the main street. Whole rows of men were mown down; they fell in the roadway, on the pavement, in doorways. Horses, horribly wounded, neighed in agony. Riddled with tracer and armour-piercing rounds, trucks and carts started smoking, then burst out in flames. A tornado of fire, smoke and explosions swept down the street.

The mad charge along the one-kilometre-long main street cannot have lasted longer than two or three minutes. Already the Y-junction at the northern end was getting close. The Jeeps were supposed to turn right here, onto the CD18, to leave the town towards St Cyr. The lead Jeep reached the junction but, instead of turning right, sped straight on along the RN6. The three others followed close behind.

No one will ever know for sure why the Jeeps missed the turn. Some say the St Cyr turn-off was blocked by German transport; others say it was hidden from view by transport parked on the main road.

A few hundred yards further on, the four Jeeps braked sharply: coming towards them, barring their escape route, was a convoy of German trucks (empty transport, it seems, coming to Sennecey to fetch troops). A few bursts of fire were exchanged, then de Combaud ordered a U-turn. The only option left was to go back up the main street again, and try to escape by the same route they had used the other way only minutes before.

Sennecey's main street looking north is still very much like it must have appeared to the SAS men in their Jeeps at the start of the charge. On the extreme right, a small plaque affixed next to the water pipe records that this is the spot where one of the Jeeps met its end (see page 10).

In a modern-day version of the Charge of the Light Brigade, the four Jeeps dashed up the main street firing their machine guns at the German columns parked on either side. Caught completely by surprise, the German force — mostly foot soldiers and horse-drawn transport — suffered gruesome losses. These images of dead horses and wrecked horse-carts are stills from film footage shot by a local amateur cine enthusiast the following day, after Allied forces had entered Sennecey from the south.

The Y-junction at the northern end of town where the Jeeps should have turned right in order to escape into the countryside. Instead, they raced straight on, continuing up the RN6. Today, the old side road to St Cyr ends in a cul-de-sac at the former railway crossing some 200 yards beyond the junction.

Racing at full speed, their Vickers still firing madly, the Jeeps retraced their route, zigzagging among bodies of German dead and wounded, past shot-up horse wagons and smoking car wrecks. But by now the Germans had recovered from their initial surprise and shock. The paratroopers were shot at from everywhere, from behind lorries, from doorways, from first-floor windows.

Shortly after the U-turn, as he reached the junction with Rue du Viel Moulin on the right, realising perhaps they would never make it to the far end of the village, de Combaud tried to turn right and escape to Laives and La Ferté. As he made the turn, his Jeep ran over a fallen bicycle. The bike jammed between the front wheel and the mudguard, stopping the Jeep on the spot. A hail of bullets hit the occupants. De Combaud and one of his men were killed instantly, but the third man managed to get out of the Jeep and reach the stairs in front of a nearby house, before he too was mortally hit.

The three other Jeeps dashed straight on

Left: **Seeing their escape via the RN6 blocked, the Jeeps swung around and came racing back into Sennecey looking for a way out. This is the main street, looking south, with the turn-off into what was then the Rue du Viel Moulin on the right.** *Right:* **The first Jeep, that of de Combaud, met its end at this spot. Stopped by a bicycle that got stuck in one of its wheels, the vehicle was raked by German fire from all sides. In a matter of seconds, the entire crew was dead. The amateur footage shot the day after included this image of de Combaud's wrecked and upturned Jeep.**

Left: **In Jean-Pierre Garnier's comparison, the memorial stone for de Combaud and his men can be seen on the extreme left, showing that it was placed almost exactly where the Jeep was stopped and the captain met his death. The corner house on the left is that of the Gemetti family where the bodies of the SAS troopers that had been killed in the charge were taken after the battle. All of them, even those showing no sign of life after capture, had been shot through the head.** *Below left:* **Another shot of the wrecked Jeep, this time looking north-west. It is not entirely clear whether the vehicle overturned by its own speed when it came careering round the corner or whether it was turned over by the Germans or French civilians later, possibly to appropriate its wheels.** *Below right:* **The shed on the corner beside the Gemetti house has been replaced by two others, but the tall roof of the first house on Rue du Viel Moulin (now Rue Guy de Combaud) provides the link between the two photos. Note the steps in front of the house — this is where the last member of Jeep No. 1 fell.**

Although Jeep No. 1 carried only two SAS men — de Combaud and Pache — and one Resistant (Magdelaine), strangely enough the text on the memorial stone reads: 'Here fell Guy de Combaud and five of his SAS paratroopers', i.e. a total of six. Presumably, the stone is commemorating the crews of both Jeeps No. 1 (de Combaud) and No. 2 (Benhamou), each of which had three men killed – but only if one includes the FFI man.

However, if this is so, the wording of the wall plaque further down the street (opposite the turn-off to St Julien — see the map on page 6) is positively puzzling: 'Here fell four French soldiers' — but the last Jeep to have all its crew killed, Aubert-Stribi's No. 3, carried only three men, not four. Moreover, the two memorials together add up to a total of ten men killed instead of the accepted nine!

down the main street in a hopeless, desperate rush. Enemy fire now blanketed them from all sides. In Jeep No. 2, now in the lead, a bullet hit the FFI volunteer, Nectoux, in the head. He fell from the vehicle but miraculously managed to crawl to a garden fence, climb over it and hide in a nearby attic. (A local inhabitant, Louis Jusseau, found him there shortly after and brought him to the infirmary improvised by the local nuns. Despite his head wound, Nectoux survived.) Seconds later, the Jeep he had been travelling in crashed into the wall of a house and exploded into flames. The three wounded paratroopers on board — Adjudant Benhamou and the two Djian brothers — died in the blaze.

Close behind, the two remaining Jeeps raced on, firing off the last of their rounds. Aubert-Stribi, in Jeep No. 3, was now trying to find a side turning to escape from the deadly mêlée in the village street. But his luck was out. A Panzerfaust round hit his Jeep square in the middle, wrecking it. Barkatz and Lombardo were killed at once, but Aubert-Stribi jumped off, Colt in hand. Exchanging shots with his assailants, he managed to reach a doorway before he too was killed.

By now all three men in Jeep No. 4 were wounded but still they drove on in a desperate attempt to get away. They were the only ones that made it. Following the same route they used to start the attack, their bullet-riddled Jeep came to a final stop in front of the cemetery gate which they had passed on the way in just a few minutes before. Coming towards them were the FFI partisans and SAS troops that by now had launched their attack on the town. Thinking they were Germans, some of the FFI opened up on them but Aspirant Tramoni, at the wheel, shouted at them to hold their fire. In a last effort, the three injured paratroopers — Tramoni, Beaude and Bailleux — stumbled out of their wrecked vehicle, the only SAS men to survive this suicidal action.

The infantry attack on the town never really got off the ground. Nervous and inexperienced, the FFI volunteers fired their weapons from too far away and were easily stopped by the German counter-fire. In an effort to get the troops moving, Capitaine Boissonas got up and started running towards the enemy, hoping his example would be followed, but he was cut down after a few steps, falling on the edge of the Laives road. Nearby, Lieutenant Zermati's group was equally pinned down. As German snipers opened up from trees, casualties among the attacking force began to mount. Soon the FFI fighters began to slip away to the south. With German reinforcements steadily arriving from Tournus, the SAS saw the hopelessness of their situation and the attack was called off.

The audacious Jeep attack into Sennecey had cost the Germans dear: an estimated 400 or 500 Germans had been killed and 300 injured. Over 30 horse-drawn transports and other vehicles had been destroyed and over 150 horses killed. However, the SAS had paid a very heavy price: of the 11 paratroopers on the Jeeps, eight had been killed. The ground attack had added another two fatalities. Of the three FFI men aboard the Jeeps, one had been killed.

None of the four attacks on the RN6 planned for that day fared very well. The one on Macon was launched too late, arriving five minutes after the last German truck had left. The attack on Tournus did not materialise because the main FFI group involved, the local FTP (Franc-Tireurs et Partisans), did not show up in time; Lieutenant Colcombet, realising that Allied armour was already approaching the town, then cancelled the attack by his SAS party. The assault on Sennecey had ended in tragedy and failure. And the one at Chalon had very little impact.

Having been informed — by telephone or by a messenger from Sennecey — that their colleagues up the road were in trouble, the SAS party under Colcombet marched to Sennecey where they arrived at noon. So did the parties of Lieutenant Porot and Sous-Lieutenant Albert Rouan from the 'Harrods' base who arrived from Montceau-les-Mines about the same time. Dispersed fighting with the retreating German troops continued around Sennecey until well into the afternoon, especially at St Martin's Hill and around Laives.

Before evacuating the town, the Germans were only able to bury some of their many dead, as Allied troops were rapidly approaching from the south. As they hurriedly left, they caught a group of farming people from Laives, men and women working a threshing machine in a field, and took them along to use as a human shield during their withdrawal. When they were some distance away from the town, they shot all 14

The last Jeep, Tramoni's No. 4, miraculously made good its escape, coming to a final stop here in front of the municipal cemetery on Route de Jugy, just outside the town. All four men aboard were wounded, but survived.

Capitaine Christian Boissonas of the 1st Company of the 3ème RCP, killed during the infantry attack on Sennecey.

Memorial to the 16 civilians murdered by the Germans at Laives during their retreat.

hostages. The oldest was 74 years old, the youngest just 16. Earlier, they had already shot two villagers, Pierre Girardot, caught carrying a weapon, and his 15-year-old son Pierre. (In reprisal for these killings the FFI would fetch 28 German prisoners of war from Chalon and execute them outside Laives churchyard the following day.)

Sennecey was finally liberated in the early afternoon of that September 4 by tanks of the French 1ère Division Blindée, part of the French IIème Corps which was operating under command and on the left wing of the US Seventh Army. Advancing from Macon to Dijon on the west bank of Saône river, they entered the town via the RD981 and St Gengoux.

Such is the story as it has been told since the war. The charge of the four Jeeps into Sennecey has become part of SAS legend and assumed almost mythical proportions in French military history. But some people, of the most reliable kind, do not agree with the accepted version. For example, SAS veterans Hilaire Colcombet and Charles Picard (today retired Général Picard) are convinced that Jeep No. 4 did not take part in the charge through the town. According to them, when de Combaud's force first entered the main street, this Jeep missed the last bend and crashed into the wall opposite (where a small marble plaque has since been affixed). The three men on board scurried away from the crash and saved their lives that way. Neither Colcombet nor Picard witnessed the action first-hand, but both came to Sennecey soon after the drama (Colcombet only a few hours later). Both are convinced, from what they were told then, that only three Jeeps participated in the charge.

Yet another version comes from André Rivot, the guide who was thrown off Jeep No. 1. He says maybe only one Jeep, de Combaud's, actually took part. He says that, curiously enough, after the tragedy, one Jeep was found abandoned in a side street.

André Rivot's version is hard to believe, for two reasons. Firstly, the results of the attack. Even if the official figures of the German losses are inflated, it is improbable that one Jeep alone, and one that went up the main street only once (it was stopped shortly after turning back) could create such havoc. Secondly, if three of the four Jeeps really did not participate in the charge, why then was the number of paratroopers killed during the action so high.

Confounding the problem for anyone trying to sort out fact from fiction is that very few inhabitants of Sennecey actually witnessed the tragedy. A large part of the population had left the town at the time, finding shelter at friends or relatives in the neighbourhood. And most of those who had remained were hiding in their cellars when it happened and did not dare to look out.

George Mugnier, who was 20 at the time, still lives at the end of what was then Rue du Viel Moulin, barely 150 yards from the junction where de Combaud fell. He says: 'When the noise of the battle ceased, I peered through shutters half ajar. I could see German troopers kicking the bodies of parachutists that were lying on the ground, at the other end of the street.'

Jeannette Gemetti lived right on the corner of the main street and Rue du Viel Moulin (she still does). She too was in her twenties. She remembers: 'The day before the battle, Underground authorities had informed my father that it would be very hot on the 4th, and advised the family to stay away. So we cycled to some relatives in a neighbouring village. When we came back, once the battle was over, we found that the house had been broken into and turned into a sickbay and mortuary. Many bloodstained bed sheets littered the floor.'

Hilaire Colcombet remembers it was in that same house that, after the action, he saw the body of his friend Guy de Combaud and of other dead paratroopers. 'Besides their other wounds, all of them had been shot in the head. Perhaps that was to obey Hitler's "Kommandobefehl" regarding the SAS.'

Since the war many have wondered why de Combaud — a sensible man of 39, cool and self-controlled, and well trained in SAS hit-and-run tactics — agreed to an attack that was clearly very risky, if not suicidal. Hilaire Colcombet has all these years vainly tried to understand what may have motivated his friend. As he says: 'With my stick, we mounted many ambush attacks on German convoys on the RN6 in the Tournus area. I always ordered a withdrawal after four or five minutes, and we ran back into the woods. My men knew they were to shoot for a limited time only, then break off and go.

'No man made more efforts to reach Britain and join the fighting than Guy de Combaud did. By August 15, most of his fellow Free French paratroopers had already been dropped into France and were fighting the enemy, but he was still idle, waiting on British soil. He feared that the war might come to an end without him. When at last he reached the Sennecey area, the Allied forces were only a short distance away, coming towards him at full speed, and he may have thought that his war was about to be stolen from him. Hence a desire to do more than necessary, more than he would have done in ordinary circumstances.'

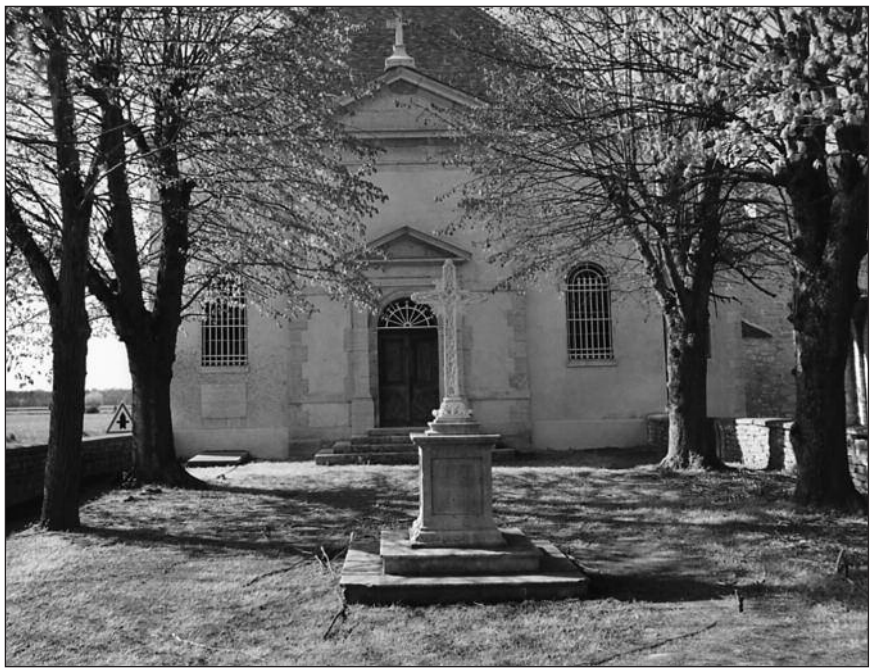
Maybe de Combaud acted the way he did because he was on home ground, and so may have felt he had to do more than usual. This is the opinion of another French SAS veteran, Michel Starckmann, who says: 'It was a mistake on the part of the SAS commanders to send him to a place where he felt at home. He would never have participated in such an affair if he had been sent to a place he did not know, and where he did not know anybody'.

The people of Sennecey never forgot the

Left: **Just a few hours after the tragic action, French troops of the IIème Corps of Général Goislard de Monsabert, attached to the US Seventh Army, entered Sennecey in strength from the south, bringing final liberation. In this still from the amateur film, a Bofors anti-aircraft gun rolls by in the direction of Chalon. The columns passing through the town belonged to CC1 (Combat Command Sudre) of the 1ère Division Blindée with elements of the 2ème Régiment de Spahis Algériens de Reconnaissance attached.** *Right:* **The same houses on Avenue du 4 Septembre today with No. 77 on the left.**

Left: **The SAS dead were buried in the town cemetery a few days after the drama. Here, the vicar and his clerics in their white surplices lead the funeral procession from the church. The coffins of the dead are carried on two Jeeps. Another still from the film.** *Right:* **Jean-Pierre's comparison was taken from the same window of the Sennecey town hall. The large building in the left background was totally hidden by trees in 1944. The church steps are just visible on the left.**

Above: **The SAS graves at the municipal cemetery were marked by white Crosses of Lorraine.** *Right:* **Today stone crosses have replaced the wooden ones of 1944. The obelisks in the background, to the left of the piper, pinpoint the spot. Picture taken during the 2002 commemoration.**



Ici reposent
unis par leur suprême sacrifice
réunis pour l'éternité
JACQUES THENARD
Capitaine au 61e Groupe de reconnaissance divisionnaire
Légion d'Honneur Croix de guerre
Tombé au combat de Longwy
le 13 Mai 1940
pour s'opposer à l'invasion de la France
GUY DE COMBAUD ROQUEBRUNE
Capitaine au 3e Bataillon de Chasseurs Parachutistes Brigade SAS
Croix de Guerre Médaille de la résistance
Tombé au combat de Sennecey-le-Grand
le 4 Septembre 1944
pour la libération de la France
A leur mémoire leurs Compagnons d'armes

Left: **Capitaine de Combaud was buried in the chapelyard of the Château de la Ferté, in a tomb shared with Capitaine Jacques Thénard, the son of the baron who owned the castle. An officer serving with the 61ème Groupe de Reconnaissance Divisionaire, he had been killed in action near Longwy on May 13, 1940. The tomb** *(right)* **is located below the grilled window on the left. When de Combaud's widow Ghislaine de Menthon died in 1993, she was buried in another family estate, the Château de Talmay (Côte d'Or) and, in compliance with her will, Guy de Combaud's remains were taken there and he now rests at her side.**

PASSANT SOUV
QUI SONT MORTS.
DE COMBEAUD GUY CAPT. 4-9-1944
BOISSONNAS CHRISTIAN — — —
AUBERT-STRIBI RENE LIEUT. — — —
LYON-CAEN GEORGES — 23-8 —
DOLHAIRE RENE — — —
MAGDELAINE JEAN R. — 4-9 —
BENHAROU JACOB ADJ.CHEF — — —
DJIAN GILBERT SERG. — — —
PACHE JEAN CAPT.-CHEF 4-9-1944
DJIAN LUCIEN 1ère CL. — — —
BARKATZ ROBERT — — —
SEITHER CHARLES — — —
LOMBARDO ROLAND — — —
LEBON LUCIEN — — —
SANCHEZ MARCEL — 17-8 —
PAGENEL MAURICE CAPT. 21-1-1944
PUTET RENE CAPT.-CHEF 20-9 —
VINCENT ROBERT 2e CL. 20-3 —
ROY HENRI CAPT.-CHEF 23-5 —
PETITJEAN EUGENE SERG. 22-6 —
MERLIN PAUL 2e CL. — —
DEMON JEAN — 23 — —
BARBIER CAMILLE — 29 — —

Above left and right: **At the northern end of Sennecey along the RN6, close to the spot where de Combaud's Jeeps made their U-turn, today stands the 'Resistance Wall'. Commemorating all who fell during the war and the liberation of Sennecey, the memorial panels include the names of the SAS dead as well. Note that some of the SAS fell in actions earlier than September 4, like Chasseur 1er Classe Marcel Sanchez, killed at Bois de la Ferté on the night of August 17/18, and Aspirant Georges Lyon-Caen, killed at Sennecey on the night of August 22/23.**

sacrifice of the SAS for their liberation. The village main street is now named Avenue du 4 Septembre, the Rue du Viel Moulin has become Rue Guy de Combaud, a monument to honour de Combaud has been erected on the spot where he fell, and every year, on September 4, the battle of Sennecey is solemnly commemorated.

Because of its place in French SAS history, Sennecey was also chosen as the location for the main SAS memorial in France. The memorial — an initiative of Georges Caïtucoli, then National President of the Amicale des Anciens Parachutistes SAS (French SAS Association); Hilaire Colcombet; and André Jarrot — was unveiled on September 4, 1984 — the 40th anniversary of the Sennecey action. Designed by artist (and SAS veteran) Jean Mélinand, it stands near the Ruffey quarry on the very spot where de Combaud formed up for his attack.

Attending the inauguration ceremony were David Stirling and Lord Jellicoe, then president and vice president of the British SAS Regimental Association. Impressed by the new memorial, the following year they proposed to 'internationalise' the Sennecey monument by making it the unit memorial for all nationalities that served in the wartime SAS. The French proudly accepted the idea and on September 4, 1988, the memorial was rededicated with the addition of bronze panels on either side listing the names of British, French and Belgian SAS soldiers who had died in the 1939-45 war. (This made the SAS unique in being the only regiment in the British Army to have its main memorial outside the UK.)

Unfortunately, by 2001, the British SAS Association had found that the list of British dead they had submitted had been very incomplete (partly due to the fact that many names of SAS dead were inscribed on the Rolls of Honour of their parent regiment and not on those of the SAS). So on September 4, 2002, in yet another rededication ceremony, several bronze plaques, bearing the names of the 96 men who had been overlooked the first time were added to the memorial. Now the names of all 507 SAS killed in action during the Second World War -- 301 British, 183 French and 23 Belgians — are recorded on the memorial.

A regular participant in the yearly commemorations at Sennecey is Jean de Combaud (centre), Guy de Combaud's only son, who was nine in 1944. Under the name of Jean Sorel, he became a famous film actor in the 1960s, his best-known film being Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour* (1967) with Catherine Deneuve. Today he lives partly in Paris, but mostly in Rome where he continues a successful career as a stage actor. This picture of him was taken during the 1984 ceremony, when he posed with two of the survivors of the Sennecey charge: Alexis Beaude (left) and Joseph Tramoni (right), from the crew of Jeep No. 4, now both dead. (Amicale SAS)

Re-dedication of the SAS Memorial on September 4, 2002. In all eight bronze plaques were added, giving the names of 96 British SAS and six French SAS that had been forgotten when the memorial was first dedicated in 1992. Here, Earl Jellicoe, Patron of the British SAS Regimental Association, delivers his address.

In the second half of October 1944, the 51st (Highland) Division launched Operation 'Colin' a westward attack in the southern Netherlands launched from the narrow salient created by the 'Market-Garden' airborne operation a month earlier. Mounted in conjunction with other attacks to the north and south — by the 53rd (Welsh) Division on 's-Hertogenbosch and by the 15th (Scottish) Division on Tilburg — the offensive aimed to drive the Germans from all territory south of the Maas river. The path of the Highland Division through this part of the Netherlands led through many small towns and villages, and made an indelible impression on the population they liberated. Throughout the operation, the 51st Division's units received support from tanks of the 33rd Armoured Brigade, like illustrated in this shot by AFPU Sergeant Dick Gee of men of the 5th Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders riding into battle on the deck of Shermans of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry north of Esch on October 26. (IWM)

HIGHLANDERS IN THE LOW COUNTRIES

By Jack Didden and Maarten Swarts

In his 1946 book *Normandy to the Baltic*, Field-Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery, although admitting that the Allies had failed in securing a bridgehead over the Lower Rhine at Arnhem, still felt that 'the Battle of Arnhem was 90 per cent successful'. He was probably the only one who felt this way and his conclusion has been the subject of debate ever since. What is clear is that Operation 'Market-Garden' at best was 60 per cent successful since only two of the three key bridges had been captured and the Allies were left in possession of a thumb-like salient deep into German-occupied territory.

This 'corridor' running from Eindhoven to Nijmegen was hemmed in on all sides by German divisions and at its narrowest point near 's-Hertogenbosch was still no more than 14 miles wide at the end of September. Bitter fighting in order to widen it, both in the west by the Canadian First Army and in the east by British Second Army resulted in extremely bloody battles at Woensdrecht and Overloon (see *After the Battle* No. 9) respectively. The German recovery was swifter than expected and the Allied dash bogged down in mud in early October.

Exasperated because of the delay, the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, on October 13 sent Montgomery one of his sternest letters of the war. He told Montgomery to use the combined strength of his 21st Army Group to clean up as far as the River Maas as soon as possible. As long as the German 15. Armee remained in possession of the area south of the Maas the enemy controlled the Schelde estuary leading to Antwerp. The opening of this port was vital as most Allied supplies still had to come from various Channel ports, most of them as far away as Normandy.

Finally bowing to his superior's instructions Montgomery issued a new directive on the 16th. He ordered Canadian First Army to advance north and British Second Army to make a 'strong thrust westwards on the general axis s-Hertogenbosch-Breda'. This attack, from the left flank of the Eindhoven-Nijmegen corridor, was assigned to Lieutenant-General Sir Neil Ritchie's XII Corps. The operation was to start 'at the earliest possible moment'.

The Canadians, on the left wing, began their attack on October 20. XII Corps followed two days later, less than a week after Montgomery's directive. At the time XII Corps consisted of four divisions: on its right (northern) wing were the 53rd (Welsh) and 7th Armoured Divisions, on its left (southern) wing the 51st (Highland) and 15th (Scottish) Divisions. The corps could also call on help from three armoured units, the 4th and 33rd Armoured Brigades and 6th Guards Tank Brigade. All in all a formidable force that should be quite sufficient to deal with the enemy units facing it.

The German LXXXVIII. Armeekorps, commanded by General der Infanterie Hans Reinhard, consisted of three depleted infantry divisions, the 712. Infanterie-Division in front of 's-Hertogenbosch, the 256. Volksgrenadier-Division near Tilburg and the 59. Infanterie-Division in between. The only armour 15. Armee could boast were some StuG assault guns, a few Jagdpanthers and some light SP guns. There could be no doubt about the outcome of the impending battle. Still, the German defenders had two factors in their favour: weather and terrain. The autumn of 1944 was very wet and cold, which meant that Allied air support would only play a minor role in the coming battle. The terrain, again typically Dutch, was flat, soggy and criss-crossed by numerous waterways. The Germans were to make excellent use of this.

Ritchie launched his two northern divisions first. The 53rd and 7th Armoured started Operation 'Alan' early on Sunday, October 22, their aim being to take the town of 's-Hertogenbosch — the lynchpin of the German defence — and then sweep the south bank of the Maas (see *After the Battle* No. 64). The advance was steady but slow and by nightfall both divisions had reached a line short of their day's objectives. It was hoped that 's-Hertogenbosch could be taken the following day. That same day, October 23, the 51st (Highland) Division was to begin its operation, code-named 'Colin'.

The 51st Division, commanded by Major-General Tom Rennie, was one of the 'old hands' of the British Army, having fought with great distiction in the First World War. In France in June 1940, about half the division had been taken prisoner near St Valéry-en-Caux. Reconstituted, it had joined Eighth Army in North Africa, fighting at El Alamein and taking part in the Sicilian campaign. After landing its first units on the Normandy beaches on D-Day the 'Highway Decorators' (a nickname derived from the ubiquitous 'HD' divisional emblem) had become embroiled in the heavy fighting east of Caen. Following the Allied break-out from Normandy the 51st as part of I Corps took part in the capture of Le Havre. After a brief respite, the division was ordered on September 30 to join XII Corps in Holland. The move took a number of days but by October 3 most of the division's units had arrived in the area between Best and Veghel, just north-west of Eindhoven.

CO of the 51st Division was Major-General Tom Rennie, pictured here with his ADC, Lieutenant Douglas Tweedie, in Rouen on September 2, 1944. (IWM)

The following weeks were spent in relative peace. The enemy, exhausted by the continous fighting since the middle of September, showed little aggression, and most of the action centred on patrolling and sniping.

The division's main opponent in the coming offensive was the 59. Infanterie-Division of Generalleutant Walter Poppe. Formed only in July 1944, it was made up almost entirely of troops on furlough from the Eastern Front and Norway. In August it had been assigned to the 15. Armee to guard the Channel coast near Calais. Before it could be committed to battle, the Normandy front had collapsed and, like the rest of 15. Armee, Poppe's division found itself outflanked by the spectacular Allied advance and during the first half of September had to run for its life along the Belgian North Sea coast. The second division to be ferried across the Schelde on September 12-13, it narrowly escaped anihilation. By then its strength had been reduced to three infantry regiments totalling 1,000 men plus an engineer battalion and the divisional artillery.

Although by now badly in need of rest, following the Allied airborne landings on September 17 it was assigned to General Reinhard's LXXXVIII. Armeekorps in charge of troops west of the Arnhem corridor. Reinhard ordered the division to Son where, in conjunction with Panzerbrigade 107 coming from the east, it was to crush the US 101st Airborne Division. The plan backfired badly and during two attacks on September 18-19, Poppe's division lost about 600 men. From then on it was assigned a purely defensive role.

By early October, Poppe had received just under 300 reinforcements from Flieger-Ausbildungs-Bataillon 51, for the most part 17- and 18-year-olds who had joined the Luftwaffe only three months earlier. Worse, on October 22, he was ordered to hand over two of his artillery batteries to the 712. Division in 's-Hertogenbosch, leaving him with only 12 guns on the eve of the attack. He had just one 75mm anti-tank gun and four 88mm guns. Aware of the value of the 88s, Poppe had positioned only one near the actual front line, covering the Eerde-Schijndel road, placing the other three and the 75mm a few kilometres back near St Michielsgestel and Den Dungen. It would prove a wise move.

To assist the 59. Division, three Fallschirmjäger battalions from Luftwaffe-Ausbildungs-Regiment 6 had been inserted alongside it. A far cry from the crack paratroop units which had fought in Normandy, these battalions actually consisted of Luftwaffe personnel scraped together from various flying units in order to provide extra ground forces. Also assigned to the Schijndel sector were the survivors of SS-Polizei-Regiment 3, elderly policemen who had acquitted themselves well earlier, actually preventing the 101st Airborne from seizing the bridges near Best on the first day of 'Market-Garden'. Subsequently reduced to company strength, they would be relieved on October 24.

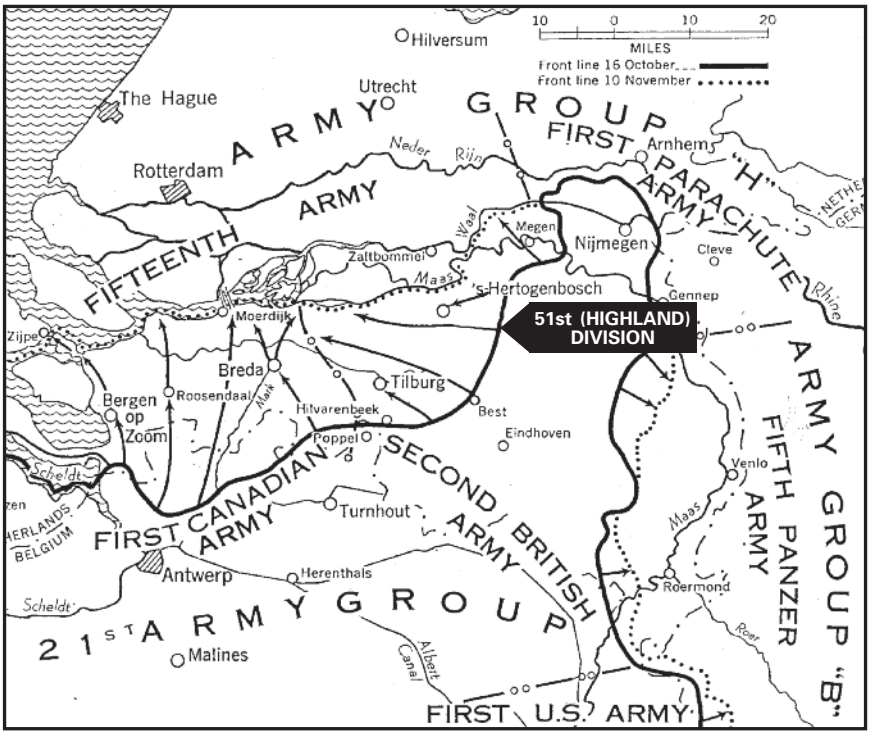
The German positions facing the 51st Division on the eve of the attack were as follows: Grenadier-Regiment 1036 from Best to a point south of Liempde; Grenadier-Regiment 1034 between Liempde and Olland; Fallschirmjäger-Bataillon Dietrichs near Olland; Grenadier-Regiment 1035 from there to a point south-west of Schijndel; and Fallschirmjäger-Bataillons Bloch and Gramse covering Schijndel. The only reserves Poppe had were two companies of Grenadier-Regiment 1035 — 2. Kompanie near Olland and 9. Kompanie near Schijndel — and the SS policemen in Olland. Poppe knew that once the attack had begun his only option would be to retreat and meanwhile try to slow down the Allied advance by making optimum use of the terrain.

The direction of the 51st Division's attack was partly determined by three canals running from east to west, the Zuid Willemsvaart and the Afwateringskanaal in the north and the Wilhelmina Canal in the south. These would automatically channel the attack as it neared the Maas, but also meant that General Rennie would not have to worry about his flanks which were protected by the canals. The main problem lay in the two smaller waterways running directly across the axis of attack. Although the Dommel and the Halse Water (and its southern contributary, the Essche Stroom) were on average no more than 50 feet wide they could still be formidable obstacles at this time of year. Rennie was acutely aware that both rivers would have to be crossed as soon as possible in order to keep up the momentum of the attack and leave the Germans off balance. Seizing the bridges over them would be the first priority. To this end, after the break-out stage, attacks would be led by tanks of the 33rd Armoured Brigade, the infantry following in so-called Kangaroos, i.e. turretless Ram tanks.

Rennie decided to attack with two brigades — the 152nd and 153rd — abreast,

Opposing the Highland Division's attack in the initial stages of Operation 'Colin' would be the 59. Infanterie-Division of Generalleutnant Walter Poppe. (BA)

keeping the 154th Brigade in reserve for the break-out. In the weeks preceding the attack the 51st Division had discovered the exact location of the enemy units through patrols, monitoring German radio traffic and interrogation of POWs. The picture that emerged revealed the weakest spot in the German defensive line to be east of Schijndel, between the two paratroop battalions Bloch and Gramse. The boundary between them was the Eerde to Schijndel road. Boundaries are notoriously weak spots as generally no commander wishes to assume responsibility for them. Rennie decided that all three battalions of the 153rd Brigade were to advance along this boundary in quick succession and seize the town of Schijndel before daylight. The 154th Brigade would then push through the hole before the enemy had time to recover from the initial surprise. The 152nd Brigade in the south was to attack westwards as far as the Dommel. The offensive was to begin just after midnight on Monday, October 23, a fitting day for the Highland Division as this was the second anniversary of of El Alamein.



OCTOBER 23

Not wanting to alert the enemy, the leading battalion of the 153rd Brigade, the 5/7th Gordon Highlanders (Lieutenant-Colonel C. D. Renny) attacked without a prior artillery barrage. They hit the German forward line at the village of Wijbosch. Warned by events around 's-Hertogenbosch, the Fallschirmjäger expected to be attacked and the Gordons suffered some casualties, but Wijbosch was in their hands by the early hours of the 23rd. The 5th Black Watch (Lieutenant-Colonel B. C. Bradford) passed through at 0645 and advanced towards Schijndel. Dawn was just breaking. Protected by a smoke screen and supported by the Shermans of A Squadron of the 4th Royal Tank Regiment, they approached their objective, the stockings factory in the south-east corner of the town, behind a creeping barrage. The backbone of the German defence had been broken and by 0750 the Black Watch were on the objective. In fact the advance had gone so swiftly that Colonel Bradford and his Battalion HQ found themselves arriving there first, the rest of the battalion having lost their way in the smoke screen. The enemy had abandoned Schijndel and begun to withdraw towards St Michielsgestel, the division's next objective. The Black Watch were joined by the 1st Gordon Highlanders (Lieutenant-Colonel H. Cumming-Bruce) who secured the south-west corner of Schijndel. The tired infantrymen settled in in and around Schijndel.

To their left the sound of fighting could still be heard. Here, the 152nd Brigade had a much bloodier battle on their hands. The 5th Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders (Lieutenant-Colonel D. B. Lang) in particular had run into unexpectedly heavy opposition. For them it had been a grim night where nothing seemed to go right. After an initial barrage they had crept forward over country bare of cover. As soon as they crossed the start line they were met by intense enemy fire from along the railway line and only one company managed to reach the objective. The artificial moonlight (searchlights reflecting their beams against the clouds) turned out to be of more help to the Germans than to the Camerons. Attempts to outflank the enemy ran into heavy fire too and Bataillon Bloch refused to budge. However, there was now a gap in the German line near Eerde and, with their left flank dangling in the air, the German Fallschirmjäger were ordered to pull back by first light. During the morning the Camerons seized all their objectives southwest of Schijndel but the price had been high. Total casualties were 71, one of them being Major Nigel Parker, the commander of D Company. Personally leading the attack he was wounded three times, rising each time until finally killed.

The main objective of the 153rd Brigade on the first day was the village of Schijndel, successfully taken by the 5th Black Watch and the 1st Gordon Highlanders. AFPU Sergeant Les Carpenter pictured men of the latter battalion moving through the shell-shattered village. This is the village main street. (IWM)

The André van Hilst chain of grocery stores no longer exists and their former shop on Hoofdstraat is now an Intersport outlet.

A Humber Mk IIIA staff car of the 1st Middlesex, the 51st Division's heavy machine gun battalion, rolls south through Hoofdstraat, returning from the front. The same buildings as in the previous picture appear in this one. (IWM)

An easy comparison due to the fact that the restored butcher shop on the left still has the same lettering on its facade. The gutted building to its right in the wartime pictures was Schijndel's town hall, later rebuilt on a different site.

Above: **Forming up for the attack in the 152nd Brigade sector. Sergeant Carpenter pictured infantry of the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders waiting in their Kangaroo armoured personnel carriers along a sandy track between Eerde and Schijndel early on October 23. The Kangaroos (turretless Ram tanks) in Operation 'Colin' were operated by the 1st Canadian Armoured Carrier Regiment. (IWM)** *Below:* **Our authors, Jack Didden and Maarten Swarts, had a hard time finding the location of this well-known picture. It was only when they learned that a side turning on the Eerde to Schijndel road (Scheiweg) had been relocated after the war that they were able to pinpoint the spot. This is Hoeves, just west of Eerde. The view is to the west. Trees obscure our view of the house on the left, but this is the same spot. The house on the right, masking the one that is just visible in the wartime picture, was built after the war.**

The other two battalions of the 152nd Brigade met far fewer problems. The 2nd Seaforth Highlanders (Lieutenant-Colonel G. L. Andrews) had a relatively easy first day. Transported in Kangaroos as they had much ground to cover, and supported by the tanks of C Squadron of the East Riding Yeomanry, they passed through the Camerons east of Schijndel towards their start line. Their route of advance was the main road from Schijndel to Boxtel. Small-scale action and felled trees held up the advance but by noon the column was approaching its objective, the bridge over the Dommel river. However, as they were about to rush the span, it was blown. The East Riding Shermans opened up on enemy positions across the river while canvas boats were brought forward. A few platoons rowed across and took some prisoners, but by then it was getting dark so it was decided to pull the platoons back and postpone the definitive crossing until the next day.

For the 5th Seaforth Highlanders (Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Walford) and half of A Squadron of the East Ridings, on the division's southern flank, the attack on Olland turned out to be a walk-over. The village was defended by one understrength company (Kompanie Schneider) that withdrew as soon as the Seaforths approached. Using

tracks along the railway line, by evening the battalion had reached its objective for the day, the intersection of the railway with the Dommel, and begun to dig in. Colonel Walford was welcomed at his HQ, a farmhouse one mile back, by what appeared to be a civilian who spoke perfect English. He turned out to be a crashed Dakota pilot who had been hidden by the farmer since the Arnhem airborne operation five weeks ago.

Left: **The attack is on. The Seaforth Highlanders, accompanied by Sherman tanks belonging to C Squadron of the East Riding Yeomanry, advance westward along the Boxtel—Gennep railway line. They are about to reach a level crossing roughly halfway between Schijndel and the Dommel river. Here they will turn right and head for the main Schijndel—Boxtel road. This is a still from film footage shot by AFPU cameraman Sergeant Seaholme. (IWM)** *Right:* **The Boxtel—Gennep line was colloquially known as the 'German line' because it continued beyond Gennep to Goch in Germany. Today it is no longer in use.**

Left: **From Schijndel, the 154th Brigade pushed on to the next town, St Michielsgestel. First to approach the place were the Sherman tanks of No. 4 Troop of A Squadron of the 4th Royal Tanks. Here they are seen on Gestelseweg turning right into a minor road leading to the town in an attempt to avoid further road-blocks. Picture by Sergeant Carpenter. (IWM)** *Right:* **The minor road is no longer used and finishes in a dead end after a few hundred yards.**

Meanwhile, further north, General Rennie had ordered the 154th Brigade to push through the gap created at Schijndel. First to get moving were the 7th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (Lieutenant-Colonel A. MacKinnon) who were ordered to clear the woods to the north-east as far as the Zuid-Willemsvaart canal. Starting out at 0800, they met very little opposition, the main problem being mines. Most German troops had by now pulled back to the second line of defence which ran from the village of Den Dungen south through St Michielsgestel to the Dommel. As soon as the road to St Michielsgestel was reported clear the brigade commander, Brigadier J. A. Oliver, at 1115 committed his second battalion, the 7th Black Watch under Lieutenant-Colonel C. Cathcart. Once again speed was essential and the battalion clattered off in Kangaroos, Shermans of C Squadron of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry in support.

However, they were not the first to arrive at St Michielsgestel. A few hundred yards ahead of them an advance party — No. 3 Troop of the 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry (the 51st Division's recce batallion) and a troop of Shermans from A Squadron, 4th Royal Tanks — was already approaching the village, eager to outrun the retreating enemy and find a route to the all-important bridge over the Dommel. About a mile short of St Michielsgestel the party ran into a German road-block made up of felled trees. A Panzerfaust was fired, but missed its mark. Machine guns blazed away at the suspected

Left: **Meanwhile, the 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry, the divisional recce battalion, accompanied by tanks of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry, continued the advance down the same road. A few hundred yards on, just outside St Michielsgestel, they ran into some serious opposition. The short fight that followed was both photographed by Sergeant Les Carpenter and filmed by Sergeant George Laws and the resulting images captured combat so well that they have become stock in trade in books and documentaries dealing with the 1944-45 fighting in Holland. Sergeant John Gray, commanding No. 3 Troop of B Squadron, was leading the column in his Daimler armoured car. In this picture, taken in the direction of St Michielsgestel — [1] on the sketch opposite — Gray had just got out of his car to take an elderly and bespectacled Fallschirmjäger prisoner. Gray recalls: 'He said he was a medical orderly because the Germans knew that we treated them with more respect, but he probably lied through his teeth because he had no medical equipment. Anyhow, I handed him over to our assault troop which were just behind me.' (IWM)** *Right:* **John Gray standing on the same spot during a return visit to the Netherlands in October 2000.**

enemy position. One frightened German surrendered but the others got away via a ditch beside the road. The tanks cleared the road-block and continued the advance. But after the first obstacle came a second, then a third and a fourth. Eventually, by 1300, the Shermans turned right, onto a minor road, in an effort to outflank other road-blocks ahead.

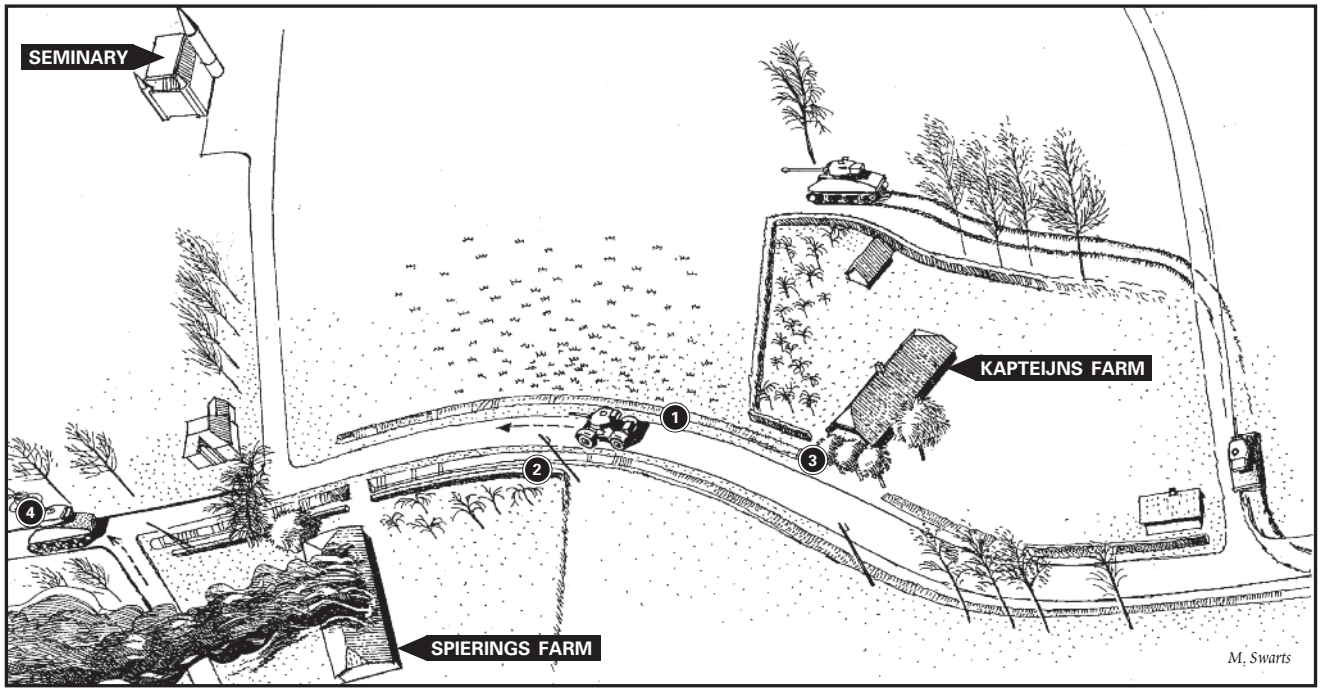
However, they were unaware that the Northamptonshire Yeomanry tanks of the other column had almost caught up with them. Nudging forward the lead tank suddenly saw shells whizzing by from the left. There was a brief moment of confusion, but it soon became clear that the firing came from the Northamptonshire Yeomanry who were approaching St Michielsgestel along the main road. Brigade was called and, as the job on hand was the responsibility of the 154th Brigade, the 4th Royal Tanks were told to pull back. They had barely left the field when the lead Northamptonshires Sherman was hit.

Another short fight erupted at the final road-block outside the village. As the Shermans spread out into the fields along the main road, two were hit. By now, the 7th Black Watch infantry had arrived and a full-scale attack on St Michielsgestel began. With tanks firing over their heads, the Black Watch cleared the first houses and German fire slackened noticeably. Two of the Shermans

As more and more mortar shells begin to crash down all around, the assault troop takes cover in a ditch alongside the road. They have left their five half-tracks 200 yards to the rear. This picture by Carpenter is looking south, away from St Michielsgestel. In front, studying the enemy through his binoculars, is Corporal Alex McCance. In the background the Kapteijns farm has not been hit yet. (IWM)

The soldiers have switched their attention to the seminary on the right (east) side of the road. The Kapteijns farm in the background has now been hit and the straw roof has caught fire. Just visible above the crops on the left, a Sherman Firefly of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry (commanded by Corporal Arthur Dwight) is heading for the seminary. (IWM)

Another remarkable comparison: Alex McCance, without his binoculars but proudly wearing his war medals, on the same spot — marked [1] on the sketch below — in October 2000. A new farmhouse has been built on the site of the old one, this time parallel to the road instead of perpendicular to it. The bike path marks the line of the ditch.



Above: **Having crossed the road to the ditch on the other side — [2] on the sketch — Sergeant Carpenter looked back to photograph a Daimler armoured car of Sergeant Gray's No. 3 Troop moving towards St Michielsgestel. Corporal Dwight's Firefly can still be seen in the field on the left. The Kapteijns house is now burning fiercely. Within 15 minutes nothing will be left of the building but smouldering ruins. (IWM)** *Below:* **Jack Didden's Fiat stands in for the Daimler.**

Right: **When the fighting broke out on the road outside, the Kapteijns family had taken shelter in an improvised protective dugout — marked [3] on the sketch — located just beside their farmhouse. However, with the house catching fire, the whole straw roof came suddenly sliding down on top of the dugout, closing the exit with burning debris and trapping the family. After some very frightening moments, the father managed to extricate himself and draw the attention of the British soldiers fighting on the road. Several of them came running back and immediately began digging with picks and shovels to remove the burning debris and in this way managed to rescue the family just in time. By now, AFPU cine cameraman George Laws had arrived on the scene and he captured the final moments of the action on film. In this still from his footage, Father Antoon Kapteijns is seen carrying his one-year-old baby daughter Sineke to safety, while his 12-year-old daughter Sjaantje has just emerged from the shelter. As one trooper points her where to go, other men continue digging to make sure that they have got everybody out. (IWM)**

A few minutes after he had brought in the German prisoner, Sergeant Gray saw the leading Sherman of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry — [4] on the sketch — being hit by a Panzerfaust. Four of the crew leaped from the tank, but one man was trapped inside. Running to the burning tank, Gray managed to haul him out by his webbing. The recce men draped the unconscious man over the bonnet of their Daimler, reversed it and dropped him off at the medical half-track of the 7th Black Watch. Gray was awarded the Military Medal for this action. (B. Zijlmans)

turned back onto the road towards the Dommel bridge, carefully negotiating every corner only too aware that they might run into an ambush any minute. They could already see the bridge and were about to cross it, when a German soldier dashed out of the bushes on the far side and blew it up. The tanks had arrived just too late. Dusk came and the tanks withdrew from the village.

Under cover of darkness, a Black Watch platoon rowed across the river and established a tiny toehold. The Germans were taken completely by surprise and hit the position with everything they had, but to no avail. By 2100 the whole batallion had moved across. The 1st Black Watch (Lieutenant-Colonel J. A. Hopwood) soon joined the 7th even though four out of their five boats were damaged by shell-fire. The two battalions established a strong bridgehead which earned them the praise of General Rennie. Under heavy shelling Royal Engineers constructed a Bailey bridge across the Dommel. It was ready by 0300 hours, enabling the first Shermans of B Squadron, Northamptonshires, to cross, ready to renew the advance the following morning.

On the division's far right flank, the advance to Den Dungen by the 2nd Derbyshires was halted after just one mile near the hamlet of Woud where about 100 paratroopers of Bataillon Gramse had dug in around two of the 88mm guns. As it would soon be completely dark the attack here was postponed until the following morning.

All in all, the first day had been a success for the Highland Division. The German front had been torn wide open. Poppe's 59. Division had lost no fewer than 784 men, which meant that his combat strength had been more than halved. General Reinhard of LXXXVIII. Armeekorps was appalled to learn that the second defensive line at St Michielsgestel had already been broken. He had no reserves left and the battle for 's-Hertogenbosch on his left wing was reaching a crisis point. Reinhard correctly suspected that an attack on his right wing near Tilburg would begin any moment and he did not dare release any more units. He appealed to General Von Zangen of 15. Armee who sent Panzerjäger-Abteilung 559 from LXVII. Armeekorps to be used in 's-Hertogenbosch. Holding that town was essential for the survival of the whole front. Another reserve, Sturmgeschütz-Kompanie 363, was positioned near Hedel, just north of the city, as Von Zangen (wrongly) assumed the Allies might make a dash for the Maas crossing there. Meanwhile, the 59. Division would have to fend for itself. Poppe was ordered to restore the situation at St Michielsgestel. Further retreat was out of the question. How he was to achieve this he was not told.

Above: **St Michielsgestel was finally secured by the 7th Black Watch late on the first day, but the Dommel bridge, which is just off the picture to the left, was blown just as the British were getting near. This picture was probably taken three days later, on the 26th, as it shows a Sherman Firefly of the 7th Armoured Division — the formation that was to follow up behind the 51st Division — passing through the town square. (NIOD)** *Below:* **The Petrus Dondersplein is now a parking area. The building at centre left is still the town hall.**

During the night of October 23/24, the Royal Engineers erected a Class 40 Bailey bridge on the site of the blown bridge at St Michielsgestel and the second stage of the advance began from here the following morning. This picture by Sergeant Jimmy Mapham was again taken on the 26th. Watched by friars from the convent in the background a Challenger tank crosses the bridge to join the other units of the 7th Armoured Division at Esch, five miles further west. (IWM)

OCTOBER 24

On Tuesday 24th, the second day of Operation 'Colin', the weight of attack shifted westward to the next river line. The starting point was the bridgehead at St Michielsgestel and the objectives would be the three spans across the Halsche Water, the last water barrier before the Highland Division reached open country. The 5/7th Gordons were temporarily detached from the 153rd to the 154th Brigade so that the latter could resume the advance with three battalions. The attack began at dawn.

First to move off were the 7th Black Watch, supported by half of B Squadron of the Northamptonshires, their target being the bridge at Halder, a mile and a half up the road. At first the Germans refused to budge and the one German 75mm anti-tank gun held up the advance. After laying down a smoke screen the advance could be resumed but the enemy fought a skilful rearguard action in Halder itself and it was not until 1235 that the Black Watch reached the Halsche Water only to see the bridge blown up in their faces. Heavy fire prevented them from making a crossing.

The second battalion to move out of the bridgehead was more successful. The 5/7th Gordon Highlanders, supported by C Squadron of the Northamptonshires, followed close on the heels of the Black Watch. They had the longest distance to cover, it being about five miles to Esch and the bridge across the Essche Stroom (the southern arm of the Halsche Water). After about one mile, at the turning towards Hal, the lead Sherman was fired upon by a light 47mm SP gun. It missed and quickly withdrew to Vught (where it was captured three days later). Unaware that the SP gun was hardly a serious threat, the column halted and an artillery concentration was called on the crossroads before the advance was resumed.

Rolling on to Esch, at noon the column had the bridge in sight when suddenly they spotted two Germans igniting charges. The lead tanks opened fire but again they were too late. The bridge went up. Lieutenant-Colonel Renny immediately sent for assault boats and two companies rowed across to establish a tiny bridgehead. They continued the attack into the night but got no further than Groenendaal, a hamlet a few hundred yards up the road towards Vught.

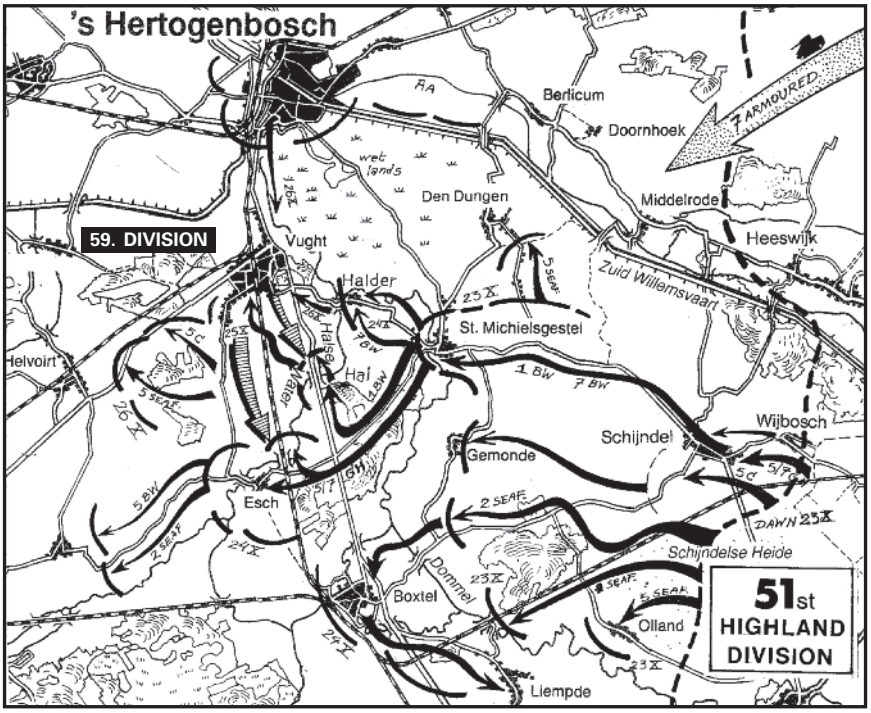
The third battalion left the St Michielsgestel bridgehead at 1100. The 1st Black Watch and the other half of B Squadron of the

After the war a new bridge was built a few yards to the east of the old bridge. The convent has been replaced by a modern apartment block.

Above: **Having been forced to give up their first toehold across the Dommel river the previous afternoon, the 2nd Seaforths prepared for a new attempt. The Germans had withdrawn from the river line during the night and the renewed attempt met little difficulty. The Dommel at this point is only a dozen yards wide and it took only a few seconds to row across. Sergeant Seaholme, now in the role of photographer, took his picture from the site of the road bridge on the Schijndel to Boxtel road, blown up by the Germans the previous day. Note the fire burning on the far river bank in the background. (IWM)** *Below:* **Today on the far side runs the Eindhoven to 's-Hertogenbosch A2 motorway.**

Northamptonshires raced along the same road towards Esch until they came to the crossroads where the German SP gun had been. Here they turned right towards their objective, the bridge over the Halsche Water at Hal. They reached it at 1315 but, naturally, it was blown up in their faces. Still, they managed to get a few soldiers across. When engineers crept forward to construct a bridge, heavy German shelling began to rain down on them. Lieutenant-Colonel Hopwood planned a ruse. He ordered his men to start constructing a bridge 300 yards to the north as soon as darkness had fallen. To the engineers' delight the Germans continued to shell the old site while the new bridge was built during the night. The 154th Brigade now had two toeholds across the Halsche Water/Essche Stroom threatening Vught. General Rennie was disappointed but at least he had some troops across and he expected Vught could be taken the following day.

In the south, the 152nd Brigade finally managed to get across the Dommel on the 24th. The previous day the 2nd Seaforths opposite Boxtel had found the crossing difficult, having been forced to withdraw their platoons from the far bank. Little appeared to have changed. The renewed attempt began at 0830 but whithering German sniper and machine-gun fire made it impossible for the infantry to even attempt a crossing. Anyone who stuck his head over the high bank was immediately hit. Supporting tank fire by C Squadron of the East Ridings was of little use: although they plastered the far bank it was too high and wide and the Germans took cover behind it. However, in the early afternoon German fire began to slacken and a second crossing attempt was made at 1445, this time successful. In the early evening the first infantrymen entered Boxtel to be greeted by enthusiastic Dutchmen as well as by 106 Allied airborne soldiers who had been in hiding since the middle of September and had actually liberated the town before the arrival of the Highlanders.



The advance made by the 51st (Highland) Division against the 59. Division during the first three days of Operation 'Colin'. (Maarten Swarts)

On October 26 the German front was cracked wide open. Sergeant Gee pictured men of the 5th Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders hitching a ride on Shermans of A Squadron of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry north of Esch. They are to block the vital Tilburg—'s-Hertogenbosch road, which lies two miles further on. Postponed again and again, the attack only got under way two hours before dusk and fighting went on well into the night. (IWM)

The reason for the sudden German departure was an order from General Poppe. His right flank was in danger of being outflanked because of the bridgeheads threatening Vught. In addition he had lost another 120 men which left him with only a few hundred combat troops. Hence he had ordered his men to withdraw another mile further west.

The only force still holding on that day were the remnants of the paratroop battalions north-east of St Michielgestel. As on the first day, the armoured cars of the 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry and the tanks of A Squadron of the Northamptonshires ran into dogged opposition from Fallschirmjäger dug in around the two 88s near Woud. Lacking infantry the attacking force soon got stuck. A Company of the 1/7th Middlesex (the 51st Division's machine-gun battalion) was sent to help. Artillery fired on suspected enemy positions, but when the smoke lifted and the attack was resumed, the Germans still resisted bitterly. The fighting lasted all afternoon. At 1830, General Rennie, recognising the need for infantry, ordered the 5th Seaforths to assist. They were rushed forward in troop-carrying vehicles but by the time they arrived night had fallen and it was decided to postpone the attack on Den Dungen until the following day.

Although XII Corps' advance had been less spectacular than the day before, the German front was slowly crumbling under the Allied pressure. The 53rd Division had entered 's-Hertogenbosch and the Highlanders had managed to cross the Halsche Water in two places. Both the 712. and 59. Divisions had incurred huge losses and it was clear that some reinforcement would have to be sent to prevent total collapse. General von Zangen of 15. Armee finally relented. That night he sent the Sturmgeschütz detachment of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 559 to 's-Hertogenbosch and assigned Sturmgeschütz-Kompanie 363 to the 59. Division. The SP guns would have to stop the Allied armour and prevent another breakthrough. Poppe was ordered to counter-attack and wipe out the two bridgeheads.

According to Sergeant Gee's dope sheets, he took the picture 'around Sprang, north of Tilburg' on October 30, but both the location an the date proved to be inaccurate. Jack Didden and Maarten Swarts only found the correct spot after careful study of the units' war diaries and contemporary maps.

OCTOBER 25

Wednesday, October 25, was another typical Dutch autumn day, bleak and dreary. General Rennie was now under increasing pressure from XII Corps. The 7th Armoured Division, having been 'pinched out' by the 53rd and 51st Divisions, was already crossing the Zuid-Willemsvaart and moving into the area between Schijndel and St Michielsgestel. As soon as Rennie's infantry had opened a gap in the German front the 'Desert Rats' were to pour through into the open country heading for the final objective, the Maas (Operation 'Don').

Rennie's northern brigade, the 152nd, was now without armoured support, the East Riding Yeomanry having been called away to assist the 53rd Division in 's-Hertogenbosch. However, this turned out be less of a problem than it appeared because the 2nd Seaforths spent a relatively quiet day at Boxtel while the 5th Camerons recuperated south-west of Schijndel, having lost eight officers and 63 men in the attack on that town. The only battalion of the brigade expecting a stiff fight were the 5th Seaforths at Den Dungen, but they too got away easily. Realising that his paratroopers in Woud and Den Dungen were in danger of being cut off, General Poppe had ordered them to withdraw to Vught. Because the Black Watch were already in Halder, the weary Fallschirmjäger had to make a long detour via 's-Hertogenbosch and they were almost engulfed in the fighting there. By dawn they arrived in Vught, providing welcome reinforcement for Poppe's depleted troops. The result of all this was that the 5th Seaforths were able to enter Den Dungen without any opposition while the 2nd Derbyshires cleared up the area as far as 's-Hertogenbosch. When the latter's armoured cars were about 100 yards from the town they came under friendly fire from tanks advancing towards them. They managed to draw the attention of the East Ridings on the other side of the town moat and then withdrew, having established that the bridge into 's-Hertogenbosch had been blown.

Meanwhile the main attack, 153rd Brigade's push towards Vught from the two bridgeheads at Esch and Hal, had been stalled before it got under way. At Esch, a Class 9 bridge had been completed during the night and the 5th Black Watch had joined the 5/7th Gordons on the north side of the river. Construction of a Class 40 bridge, capable of carrying armour, had only just begun, so until that was ready the infantry would have to fend for itself. However, at 0915, before the two battalions could form up for the advance, the Germans launched a fierce counter-attack. Heavy fire eventually caused the Germans to withdraw leaving behind many dead and wounded, but it was clear that no attack could be undertaken here without the support of the tanks.

The advance from Hal fared little better. The first vehicles to cross the bridge there at first light were the armoured cars of the 11th Hussars, the recce regiment of the 7th Armoured Division, who raced off towards Vught hoping to find a gap in the enemy front. Just beyond the river they came under heavy fire and had to pull back. The 51st Division was ordered to take over. The 1st Black Watch crossed the bridge and spread out along the main road, while B Squadron of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry led the advance. A few hundred yards short of Vught, near the hamlet of Voorburg, they ran into what can only be called a classic ambush. First the lead Sherman was knocked out by a skillfully camouflaged StuG III of Sturmgeschütz-Kompanie 363. The SP gun then hit the OP tank following No. 3 Troop. This tank swung around, blocking the road and trapping the vehicles in front of it. The StuG then proceeded to knock out all four Shermans of No. 3 Troop plus six carriers and a half-track. Within 15 minutes this lone SP gun had destroyed 13 vehicles. (a feat reminiscent of Michael Wittmann's famous exploit at Villers-Bocage — see *Villers-*

The picture turned out to have been taken here, along Witvenseweg, the road connecting Esch and Vught. The view is west.

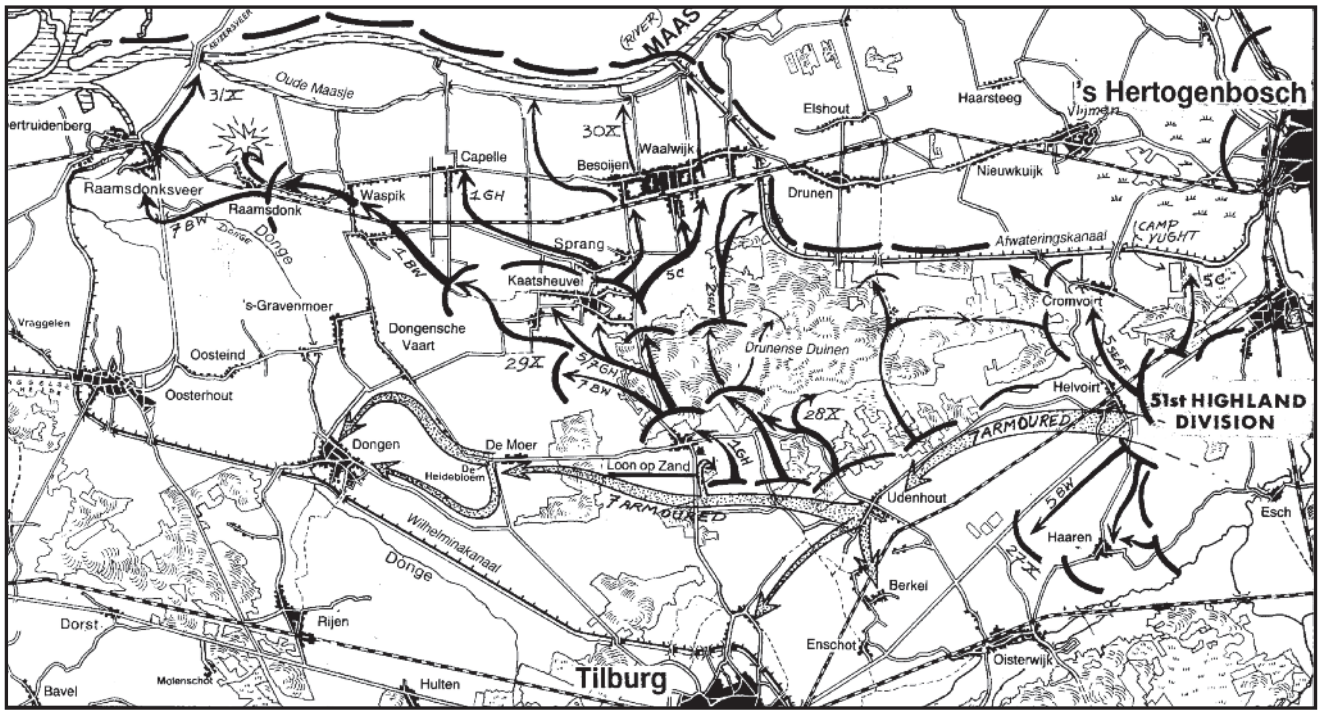
Moving some 100 yards further west, Gee pictured C Company of the 5th Camerons mounting other Shermans of A Squadron of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry. They will advance to the objective via a parallel route. (IWM)

Bocage Through the Lens). But the fight was not yet over. An attempt to outflank this tank trap by No. 1 Troop backfired. Three of its four tanks were disabled in quick succession by German SPs and a Black Watch infantry platoon was surrounded. It was only the timely arrival of the 7th Argylls that turned the scale. The platoon was rescued (although its commanding officer was killed) and the only surviving Sherman of No. 1 Troop, the one commanded by Sergeant Falconer, finally managed to locate the first German SP and knock it out. The StuG which had wreaked such havoc on the Northamptonshires was destroyed later that day by Shermans from C Squadron which had come up to relieve B Squadron. This move came too late in the day and the advance towards Vught was postponed until the following morning.

All in all the Germans could look back on a fairly successful day. They had been able to halt the enemy advance and knock out a considerable number of armoured vehicles. Still, General Reinhard of LXXXVIII. Armeekorps noted soberly: 'If the enemy attack continues in its present scope and strength combined with our own huge losses, a deep and serious breakthrough which our present troops will not be able to stop is to be expected sooner or later.' Events were to prove him right, rather sooner than later.

That evening, at a conference at his Tactical HQ at the golf course near St Michielsgestel, General Rennie decided that too much time had been lost that day and that the attack would have to continue during the night. All three brigades were to be engaged. The 153rd Brigade (to which he attached the 2nd Seaforths) was to expand the bridgehead at Esch in a north-westerly direction to open up the way for the 7th Armoured Division. At the same time, the 154th Brigade was to attack from Hal and Halder towards Vught. Later, the 152nd Brigade (minus the 2nd Seaforths) was to exploit between these two, cutting the Tilburg to 's-Hertogenbosch main road.

The same road, the Pickensteeg, today, looking back east towards Esch. Only occasional farm traffic passes here nowadays. The trees on the left were planted long after the war.



In the last five days of October, the Highlanders continued their advance, pushing the Germans back across the Maas. (M. Swarts)

Left: **The 7th Black Watch entered Vught on October 26. In the woods nearby was the site of a notorious Nazi concentration camp. The Highlanders were shocked when they came across the deserted camp later that day — a premonition of more horrors to come in Germany the following year.** *Right:* **Most of the buildings along Taalstraat remain unchanged.**

OCTOBER 26

Just after midnight, units of the 59. Division near Esch reported groups of enemy infantry infiltrating the woods near the small village of Heesakker. It was the 1st Gordon Highlanders expanding the bridgehead. Poppe at once dispatched some 80 infantrymen to cut them off, but they arrived too late and all they could do was dig in around a huge country house which happened to be C Company's objective. While the other companies secured their objectives, the Germans in the house held firm. Because it was too dark to get a good look at the German defences, the battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Harry Cumming-Bruce, decided to wait for daylight. At dawn he had artillery plaster the German stronghold. With the Class 40 bridge finally completed at 0715 two troops from the 4th Royal Tanks joined the attack. It was an immediate success and 60 Germans surrendered, nearly the whole force that had been sent to destroy the Gordons. The Gordons were now firmly established in Heesakker and the bridgehead had more than doubled in size.

Soon more troops left the Esch bridgehead, first the 5th Black Watch (plus A Squadron, 4th Royal Tanks), followed by the 2nd Seaforths (plus B Squadron, 4th Royal Tanks). They made good progress to the south-west until once again the SPs of Sturmgeschütz-Kompanie 363, which had withdrawn to a position near Haaren, reared their ugly heads. Because of the open terrain they were able to spot the British armour as it was approaching the hamlet of Belvert about a mile away. One StuG managed to knock out three Shermans before it was itself spotted by an A Squadron tank and silenced. Mounting losses slowly ground the advance to a halt. During the morning the first units of the 7th Armoured Division had crossed the bridge at Esch keen to exploit the opening in the enemy front. Hundreds of vehicles belonging to the 22nd Armoured Brigade poured into the enlarged bridgehead, resulting in an enormous traffic jam in the area between Esch and Belvert-Heesakker. All the Highland Division's vehicles were told to pull off the road but it was not until noon that the 5th Royal Tanks, followed by the 1st Royal Tanks, were finally able to leave the bridgehead behind them. Reaching the Tilburg—'s-Hertogenbosch main road, the 5th Royal Tanks began slowly to work their way down towards Tilburg. Spectacular advance was made by the 1st Royal Tanks who took the northern route via Helvoirt. They met very little resistance and at 1600 reached Udenhout, ten miles from their starting point at Esch.

But worse was to come for the Germans. While the 7th Armoured Division was rushing through the gap, the 152nd Brigade formed up to exploit from Esch and cut the Tilburg—'s-Hertogenbosch road further north. Because of the traffic jams the attack was postponed several times. After much cursing and shouting at all levels, the 5th Camerons finally arrived at their starting point at 1600 by which time there were only two hours of daytime left. With the Germans seemingly on the run, it was decided to make the most of it. The 5th Seaforths were still too far behind to join in the attack and so it was up to the Camerons, supported by A Squadron of the Northamptonshires. All went well for the first hour but 500 yards from the objective the force ran into serious opposition. Not until three hours after darkness did the Camerons reach the main road, where they dug in for the night.

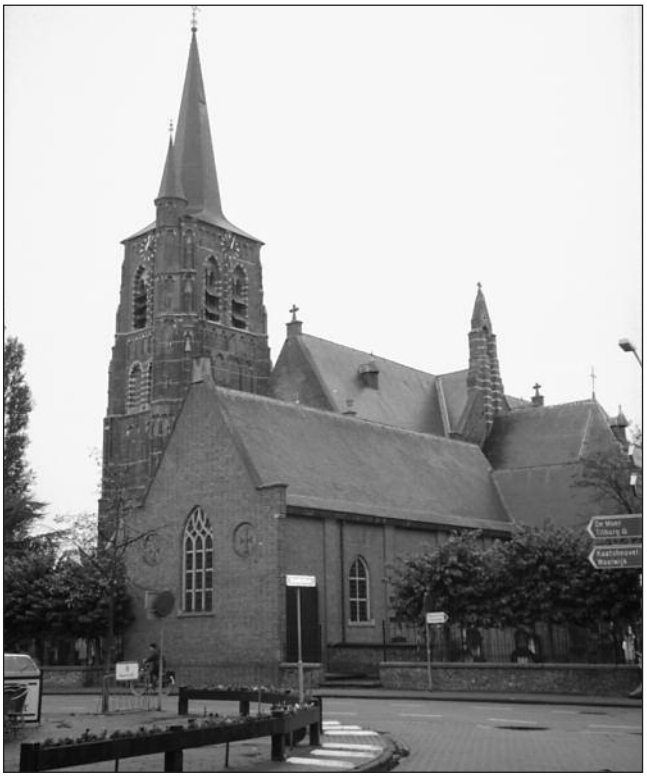
The advance from the other two bridgeheads went equally well. Vught, which had eluded the Highlanders the previous day, was finally captured. The 7th Black Watch broke out of the Halder bridgehead and after a short fight at a road-block secured the town at noon. Three hours later the 1st Black Watch supported by B and C Squadrons of the Northamptonshires entered the town from the south. There was a brief moment of confusion as a party of about 20 Germans attacked battalion headquarters. Lieutenant-Colonel Hopwood grabbed a Bren gun which jammed after one shot, but it was enough. The Germans lost heart and gave themselves up.

October 26 had been a black day for the Germans. The 59. Division's front had been broken open and its units around Haaren were in danger of being cut off. The commander of Grenadier-Regiment 1036, Oberst Günther von Dewitz, had been wounded and taken prisoner near Helvoirt (he later died of his wounds). Moreover, contact between the 59. Division and the 256. Division near Udenhout had been lost. That night General von Zangen gave LXXXVIII. Armeekorps permission to withdraw to a new line, known as Stellung Zwei (Position Two), running from Dongen through Loon-op-Zand to the Afwateringskanaal. Rear units, such as heavy artillery, were allowed to go back across the Maas. Poppe's depleted division was to pull back behind the Afwateringskanaal, while the 256. Division was to hold the rest of the line, delaying the Allied advance for as long as possible. General Reinhard of LXXXVIII. Armeekorps noted: 'Our battle-weary and severely depleted units will not be able to resist for very long in the new line.'

OCTOBER 27

Friday, October 27 was a relatively calm day for the 51st Division. The 7th Armoured Division was now leading the advance towards the Maas and the Highlanders were mainly involved in mopping-up operations behind the Desert Rats. However, the next day already the Highlanders were needed to break the deadlock at Loon-op-Zand, a crossroad village which formed a key position within Stellung Zwei. To reach the Maas the Allies would have to capture it. The commander of the 256. Division, Oberst Gerhard Franz, had assigned half of his infantry units to its defence, positioning one battalion (I. Bataillon of Grenadier-Regiment 456) in the village itself while two others took up positions to the east (II. Bataillon of Grenadier-Regiment 481) and north (III. Bataillon of Grenadier-Regiment 456). In addition he had five 75mm anti-tank guns plus the two remaining StuGs of Sturmgeschütz-Kompanie 363. Although the 256. Division was composed mainly of 16- and 17-year-olds and was very inexperienced, it had joined LXXXVIII. Armeekorps just six days earlier so it was still relatively fresh. This explains why the 7th Armoured Division was unable to take the village by surprise. Later efforts, each one preceded by extremely heavy shelling, also failed, so the Highlanders were called upon to do the job.

From October 27, the Highland Division met a new opponent: the 256. Volksgrenadier-Division commanded by Oberst Gerhard Franz. (BA)



Left: **The churchyard in Loon-op-Zand immediately after the fighting. It was here that a platoon of Germans from Grenadier-Regiment 456 made a last stand against converging units of the 51st Division on October 28. Heavy Allied shelling has seriously damaged the church. Four civilians lost their lives, a very low figure considering the devastation inflicted on the village. (Korthout)** *Right:* **This turning used to be on the main road from Tilburg to Waalwijk, but traffic here is far less dense nowadays due to the motorway bypass completed in the 1980s.**

OCTOBER 28

While the 7th Armoured tried to bypass Loon-op-Zand to the west the first units of the 51st Division arrived early on October 28. At a conference in Udenhout, General Rennie decided to go in with two brigades. He ordered the 153rd Brigade to tackle the village head-on while the 152nd Brigade was to attack east of the village, move north into the woods and then make a left turn to cut off the enemy's retreat.

The attack began at 1515 after a short barrage. To their surprise the 1st Gordons and B Squadron, 4th Royal Tanks, found the going very easy. The constant shelling had taken a heavy toll on the inexperienced enemy troops. German prisoners complained about the chaos and the contradictory orders they had received. Only one determined company held out at the village churchyard, but they too fled after dark. By 1845 Loon-op-Zand was taken. Meanwhile, the 152nd Brigade's attempt to outflank the German defences was less successful. The 2nd and 5th Seaforths had managed to penetrate the German line east of Loon-op-Zand but soon got lost because of extensive minefields and very dense woods. The 2nd Seaforths failed to cut off the German retreat in the failing light and decided to stay put. Further east the 2nd Derbyshires cleared as far as the Afwateringskanaal where they found all bridges blown. On the far bank the 59. Division was digging in.

With the Germans appearing to be on the run and the Maas now only five miles away, General Rennie ordered the 5th Black Watch to push through the 1st Gordons as far as the village of Horst, just south of Kaatsheuvel. The advance, which began at 2200, had a nightmarish quality. In the pale light of the full moon enemy soldiers seemed to lurk behind every tree (as indeed they did in some instances).

OCTOBER 29

It was not until the morning that the Black Watch finally neared Horst. Seeing German guns ahead they called for the armour support. A Squadron, 4th Royal Tanks, arrived at 0730, outflanked the German position and knocked out the guns which turned out to be 105mm howitzers from II. Abteilung of Artillerie-Regiment 256. Large numbers of Germans were seen streaming back towards Kaatsheuvel. The 5/7th Gordons then joined the 5th Black Watch in Horst.

Left: **Pushing north from Loon-op-Zand, early on the 29th the 5th Black Watch attacked De Horst, a hamlet on the main road to Waalwijk just south-east of Kaatsheuvel, which was defended by elements of the 256. Volksgrenadier-Division. This knocked-out 10.5cm howitzer (Leichte Feldhaubitze 18/43) was one of three such guns left behind by the Germans after the battle. The unit marking on the gun shield is a bit of a mystery as it is the sign of the 18. Panzergrenadier-Division, which never fought anywhere near here. However, both this division and the 256. Division had got mauled on the Eastern Front during the preceding summer so maybe, when the two were reconstituted, this gun ended up with the wrong unit.** *Right:* **The same spot today. The house in the background pinpoints the location.**

Left: **After De Horst came Kaatsheuvel. Here men of the 5/7th Gordon Highlanders move through Gasthuisstraat past houses damaged by the artillery barrage which preceded the attack on the village. The soldier on the right is a Frenchman, Marcel Menard, who had joined the Highlanders in France. The men are in fact moving back in the direction from where they came. When the Allied troops entered their village in the afternoon of the 29th, several inhabitants of Kaatsheuvel were still trapped under the debris of their houses. In all, 28 civilians lost their lives, a huge blow to this small community. (IWM)** *Right:* **The house of the Van Riel family on Gasthuisstraat was completely rebuilt after the war.**

Early on October 30, Sergeant Gee pictured carriers of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders preparing to advance into Waalwijk from the south. They have just left the woods and sand dunes of the Loonse en Drunense Duinen behind them and are now on Waalwijkse Baan. All three battalions of the 152nd Brigade used this same road to advance on Waalwijk. The 5th Seaforths set off first as they had the longest distance to cover, their objective being Besoyen, the western part of the town. (IWM)

Before attacking Kaatsheuvel the village was subjected to a heavy barrage. At noon the Gordons, assisted by C Squadron, 4th Royal Tanks, entered the village. The Germans fought a skillful rearguard action but three hours later the village was in British hands. All three battalions of the 154th Brigade were rushed forward in Kangaroos to keep the momentum of attack and fighting went on well into the night. The advance was finally halted at the hamlet of Zandschel, two miles further west, where a group of Germans plus the last surviving StuG had dug in.

To the east the 2nd and 5th Seaforths (152nd Brigade) had plodded through the sand dunes and woods until they were level with the Gordons in Kaatsheuvel. Only flat polderland now lay between the Highlanders and the Maas. The final objective of 'Colin' at last lay within grasp.

The Germans had arrived at the same conclusion. That evening, General Reinhard ordered his troops to fall back across the Maas. Then Hitler himself intervened. Through OB West he ordered 15. Armee to 'maintain at least a few large bridgeheads south of the Maas'. Consequently von Zangen ordered the 59. Division to stay behind the Afwateringskanaal keeping a particular eye on 's-Hertogenbosch, now in Allied hands. At the same time the 256. Division was to set up a strong perimeter around the vital bridge at Keizersveer.

This area on the edge of what is now the Loonse en Drunense Duinen National Park has seen little change.

Left: **Around 1100 hours, the 5th Seaforths arrive in Besoyen — described by their Intelligence Officer, Captain Alastair Borthwick, as 'a neat little village, very clean, its single cobbled street filled with people who wanted only to make us comfortable.' The house on the left is where our author Jack Didden's grandparents used to live.** *Right:* **Besoyensestraat today.**

Left: **Meanwhile the other two battalions of the 152nd Brigade also entered Waalwijk via the same route. A local photographer, Jan de Bont, pictured the 5th Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders moving past a cluster of houses known as Het Hoekje towards the centre of town.** *Right:* **Both houses have been renovated but remain recognisable.**

OCTOBER 30

This explains why Monday, October 30, was a day of contrasts. Both the 152nd and 153rd Brigades found the going easy. During the morning the 152nd Brigade on the right entered the town of Waalwijk, the only obstacle being crowds of cheering Dutch. Patrols were dispatched to the Maas. The enemy had gone and the only prisoners taken were stragglers. The 153rd Brigade advanced into a vacuum too, the 1st Gordons taking the villages of Sprang and Capelle just after noon. However, a few miles further west, the 154th Brigade hit the outer perimeter which the 256. Division was setting up. At Waspik the 1st Black Watch and A Squadron of the Northamptonshires ran into an ambush. A hidden 75mm anti-tank gun knocked out the lead Sherman. After a brief fight the enemy gunners fled, abandoning their gun.

The next nut proved harder to crack. Passing through the Black Watch, the 7th Argylls and B Squadron headed for the Keizersveer bridge, the final objective of operation 'Colin'. Entering Raamsdonk — the penultimate village before it — around noon, the two leading Shermans were hit by another anti-tank gun. The third managed to knock it out. Shells hit a building which the Germans used to store ammunition and it went up in a devastating explosion. Smoke filled the streets and chaos was complete. All attempts to penetrate the German lines were stopped and in the failing light the Argylls were ordered to consolidate. Once again, the Germans had gained precious time.

As the 53rd Division had by now been called away, the 153rd Brigade was ordered to take over 's-Hertogenbosch. The 154th Brigade would have to make the ultimate push alone.

Aware of the danger he was in and under orders from the Führer to hold the Keizersveer bridge at any cost, Oberst Franz assigned the defence of the bridge to Oberstleutnant von der Damerau-Dombrowski's Grenadier-Regiment 476, reinforced by the division's three StuG IIIs and one Jagdpanzer 38(t) Hetzer. To make doubly sure the battle group would not crack, he also sent the division's recce battalion, schnelle Abteilung 505, which had five half-tracks with 2cm Flak guns, to Raamsdonk. They took up position near St Lambert's Church on the main road to the bridge. It was here that the final battle of Operation 'Colin' would take place.

Left: **Scottish infantry in Grotestraat in the centre of Waalwijk. The joy of liberation was rudely interrupted when German shells fired from across the Maas suddenly rained down on the unsuspecting crowds. Two people were killed, one a seven-year-old girl.** *Right:* **The same stretch of Grotestraat as it looks today.**

On October 31, the 7th Black Watch and C Squadron of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry fought a stiff battle with German armour from schnelle Abteilung 505 lying in wait at the village of Raamsdonk, the last German stronghold barring the way to the Maas bridge at Keizersveer. In this brief, confused encounter the British lost five vehicles, the Germans eight. This shot shows the chaos on the road shortly after the battle: in front is Corporal Jack Ginns' bogged-down Sherman; further on in the same ditch lies Lieutenant Ian Donaldson's Kangaroo. (S. Zijlmans)

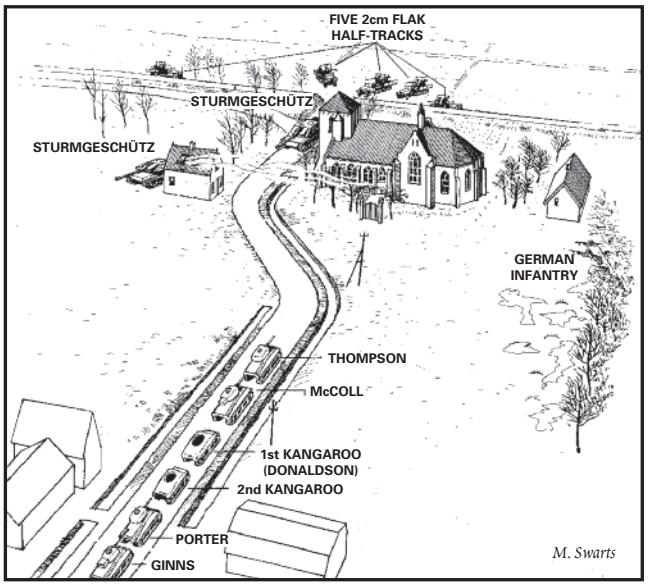
Peace and quiet has returned to the Reformed Church at Raamsdonk.

OCTOBER 31

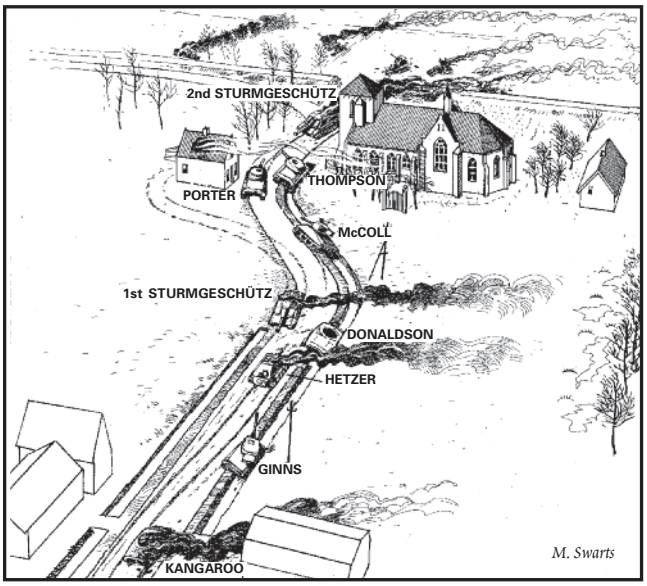
At first light on the 31st the advance into Raamsdonk was resumed. The 7th Argylls, with B Squadron, Northamptonshires, drove forward but opposition was fierce and the advance slowed to a crawl. By now the Argylls were exhausted, having suffered nearly 80 casulaties in the village, so the 7th Black Watch with C Squadron were to make the final push.

From a road junction in the centre of the village the main road led straight to Raamsdonksveer — the village immediately south of the Keizersveer bridge — while a secondary road led to the same point via a tortuous and long detour. Lieutant-Colonel Cathcart decided to use the shorter route unaware that it was here that the main German battle group lay in wait. He ordered his troops to shoot their way through and rely on speed. A tank troop followed by an infantry platoon in two Kangaroos set off at 1600 after a brief barrage, but they came to a halt within minutes. The lead tank, a Firefly commanded by Sergeant Thompson, spotted two StuGs and, firing off shells in rapid succession, knocked them both out. However, the road was very narrow and slippery and in the smoke and confusion the leading three vehicles — Thompson's Firefly, the Sherman of troop leader Lieutenant Robert McColl and the Kangaroo of platoon leader Lieutenant Ian Donaldson — all ended up in the ditch alongside the road. The infantry leapt from the Kangaroos and spread out. The next tank, a Sherman commanded by Corporal Ossie Porter, bypassed the vehicles which now partly blocked the road and shot up the five flak half-tracks. Another Firefly, the one commanded by Corporal Jack Ginns, tried to follow but this too ended up in the ditch. Suddenly the Hetzer appeared in the attackers' rear and knocked out the Kangaroo that was still on the road. Corporal Ginns' Firefly, although partly in the ditch, reacted instantly and disabled the Hetzer. Thirteen vehicles (eight of them German) were destroyed in this brief battle.

Colonel Cathcart, realising that all hope of a quick dash to the bridge was now gone, ordered the rest of his force to take the long detour route. They encountered far less opposition and as night fell entered Raamsdonksveer. German troops were fleeing back across the bridge, with Allied soldiers close on their heels. As soon as the last stragglers had crossed, the Germans blew the bridge at 2200 hours. For his stubborn defence at Raamsdonksveer Oberstleutnant von der Damerau was recommended for the Iron Cross.



The situation at the beginning of the fight. The British column arrives at the church where the German AFVs lie in wait.



The result of the fight: three Shermans and two Kangaroos disabled; two StuGs, one Hetzer and five flak wagons destroyed.

In the days and weeks after the battle, the disabled armour was pulled away from the road and into the adjoining fields. In this shot taken from the church tower in early 1945 five of the wrecks remain — the two StuG IIIs, the Shermans of Sergeant Thompson and troop leader Lieutenant Robert McColl, and Lieutenant Donaldson's Kangaroo. (B. Zijlmans)

The two StuGs were on detachment to schnelle Abteilung 505 from StuG-Abteilung 256. (Mémorial de Caen)

The house in the background has lost one chimney but otherwise remains unaltered.

Left: **Another shot of the same field, but now looking north. From left to right are the Hetzer knocked out by Corporal Ginns (this originated from StuG-Abteilung 363); Lieutenant McColl's Sherman and the same Sturmgeschütz — a late Ausf. G — again.** *Right*: **The main road to the Keizersveer bridge no longer runs past the church. (B. Zijlmans)**

One of the field cemeteries established by the 51st (Highland) Division in the 'Colin' area was at the hamlet of Kuil, just north of Udenhout. Buried here were three Highlanders — Privates John Cameron (5th Black Watch), G. E. Wall and H. W. Cab (both 2nd Seaforths) — plus three men of the 7th Armoured and six Canadians killed in early November. *Below:* **All bodies were exhumed in the spring of 1945 to be reinterred at the Bergen op Zoom War Cemetery and today no trace remains of the cemetery.**

The 51st Division had finally reached the banks of the Maas, everywhere except for the 'island' behind the Afwateringskanaal around Drunen. (This would be cleared five days later in a separate attack, named Operation 'Guy Fawkes'.) Operation 'Colin' had been successfully concluded, but it had been costly. British casualties (including those of 'Guy Fawkes') numbered 674, of whom 122 were killed. 'Colin' had gone in fits and starts. Days of spectacular advances had been followed by complete standstills. It had taken the four divisions and three armoured brigades of XII Corps ten days to drive three understrength German divisions across the Maas. The outcome of 'Colin' and its sister operations had never been in doubt, but the Germans had managed to gain valuable time, albeit at a very high price: almost 3,000 had been taken prisoner and roughly the same number had become casualties. The 59. and 712. Divisions had been reduced to battalion strength and the 256. Division had fared little better. But at least they had withdrawn safely behind the Maas.

There was no such luck for the Allied divisions who were soon ordered to the eastern flank of the corridor where they had to fight the same slogging matches with the enemy until, finally, on December 3 all Germans this side of the Maas were gone. The winning mood of the heady September days was now definitely a thing of the past and nobody in his right mind any longer believed that the war might be over by Christmas.

Below: **The final act of this autumn campaign in Holland was Operation 'Guy Fawkes' (November 4-5) when the 51st Division drove the 59. Division from its last remaining bridgehead south of the Maas. This memorial on the sand road from Giersbergen to Cromvoirt marks the initial burial place of six members of the 5th Black Watch killed in the initial crossing of the Afwateringskanaal on November 4. It appears possible that a mistake was made for the sixth man killed in that crossing was not Private Philip Aylen but Private Jeffrey Bradley.**

This memorial of a little Dutch girl presenting flowers to a Highland soldier fittingly commemorates the part played by the 51st (Highland) Division in the liberation of this part of the Netherlands. Designed by Scottish artist Alan Herriot, it was unveiled near Eerde on October 23, 1994 — exactly 50 years after the start of Operation 'Colin' — by Lieutenant-General Sir Derek Lang, in 1944 commander of the 5th Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. Relocated a few years later, it now stands in a prominent position along the St Oedenrode—Schijndel road. A replica of the memorial was unveiled on May 13, 1995 in Perth.

From December 1940 to May 1944, the château of Ter Linden, just outside Brugge (Bruges) in Belgium, served as the main Kriegsmarine wireless interception station in north-west Europe monitoring Allied surface shipping. This picture, taken during a roll call in 1942, shows the castle and some of the steel aerial masts which were erected in the estate grounds. The mast on the far right and the one in front of the château, next to the flagpole, are 40 metres high (the third of these masts is outside the picture to the left). The thicker one in the foreground is a flagpole.

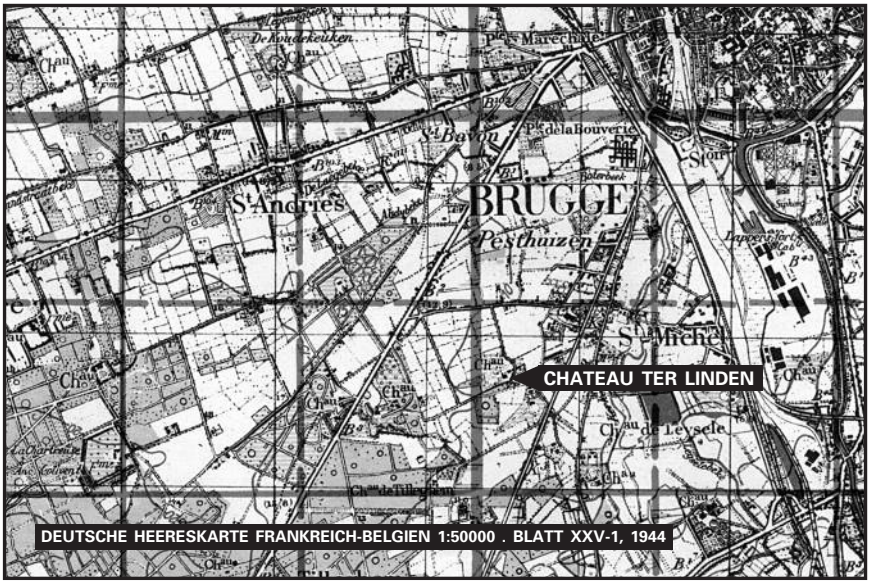
KRIEGSMARINE LISTENING POST AT CASTLE TER LINDEN

By Luitenant-ter-zee 1ste klasse Jo Bergez

Outside the village of St Michiels, three kilometres south-west of Bruges in Belgium, is the site of an old château known as Kasteel (Castle) Ter Linden. During the Second World War this served as a nerve centre for German naval intelligence.

At the beginning of the war the château was owned by Count Pierre de Briey. The building's central wing dated back to the 17th century. This part comprised the 'Salon Rose', a sitting room with walls covered in natural red silk, and the 'Salon Blanc' where gold leaf decorated the white furniture. Later, two side wings and a terrace had been added to the building. Behind the château were the stables, barns and storehouses as well as the gardener's and driver's houses. In front lay a big lawn, surrounded by a dense wood and a pond.

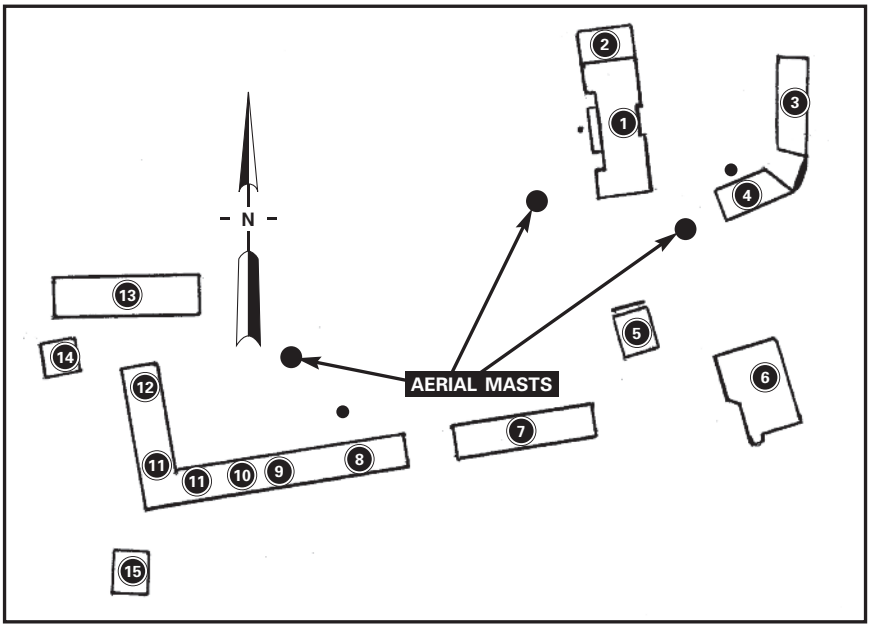
During the German Blitzkrieg in the West of May 1940 — known as 'the 18-day campaign' in Belgium — the château was occupied in turn by Belgian, French and German soldiers. In December of that year, the German Kriegsmarine took over the building. The château was completely sealed off with a barbed-wire fence and sentry guards placed at the access lanes. Belgian construction workers and civilians from Bruges pressed into service were put to work to assist a German military workforce in transforming the site into a military base. The civilian workers had to surrender their identity card at the entrance and were escorted by a guard at all times. Work continued practically seven days a week. While the soldiers cut down trees and constructed paths, the Belgian firms built concrete shelters and wooden huts designed to house offices, sleeping quarters and a canteen kitchen. The shelters were covered with a layer of earth and plants. One shelter contained two mines which the Germans intended to use to blow up the castle in the event of evacuation. Other work



Château Ter Linden stood two miles south-west of Bruges, outside the village of St Michiels. Note the number of other châteaux in the immediate surroundings, several of which were used to accommodate German personnel.

Apart from adding an extra wing to the château, the Germans built several huts and bunkers in the grounds. [1] The château housing (north to south) rooms for the teleprinter, interpretation staff, maps, and monitoring operatives. [2] The extension with a classroom on its ground floor and offices above. [3] Guardhouse and telephone exchange. [4] Infirmary and guard commander's office. [5] Weapons and ordnance storage bunker. [6] Bunker (under construction). [7] Administrative staff. [8] Other Ranks' quarters. [9] Other Ranks' mess. [10] Kitchen. [11] NCO's quarters. [12] Junior NCO's mess. [13] Sergeants' quarters and mess. [14] Medical shelter. [15] Supply storage bunker.

involved erecting antennae masts and digging ditches for underground cables. The château was supplied with central heating and sanitary fittings were installed in the rooms. On the northern side, a two-storey wing was added to house extra offices. The château's radiant white walls were painted over in grey and green camouflage colours. However, no anti-aircraft guns were set up in the castle grounds.



Fregattenkapitän Lothar von Heimburg, commander of Marine-Peil-Hauptstelle Flandern from 1942 to 1944. He won the Iron Cross in both wars.

Weapons cleaning at Ter Linden. The man on the far right is Obergefreiter Erwin Merz. Visible on the right is the hut housing the other ranks' billets and kitchen, with the administrative office hut (Schreibstube) beyond. In the left background stands the Waffenbunker where the weapons and other ordnance were stored.

A closer view of the Waffenbunker showing its grassed roof, applied as camouflage against detection from the air. This picture was taken during an inspection by Fregattenkapitän von Heimburg at an award-giving ceremony.

None of the wartime constructions in the castle grounds remain today. A plain garden hedge now marks the spot where the Waffenbunker once stood. Behind it runs the Expressweg built in the 1970s to connect Zeebrugge with the E40 motorway.

Left: **The guard detachment marches out from Ter Linden to begin a Gepäckmarsch (march with back load), one of five disciplines to be successfully completed to gain the Sportabzeichen (Sports Medal). First row centre is Kapitänleutnant Hans Breuss, commander of the 1. Kompanie of Marine-Peil-Hauptstelle Flandern, the unit stationed at Ter Linden. Note the unit emblem above the gate — an anchor intertwined with a lightning striking at Britain.** *Above:* **The château and all its outhouses were razed to ground after the war to be replaced by new housing around the intersection of two new roads: Expressweg and Wittemolenstraat. The gatehouse stood right here, in the middle of what is now Expressweg.**

Kriegsmarine security measures were very strict. The German personnel were bound under oath to total secrecy and throughout the war their activities remained a mystery to the Belgians.

As in the First World War, the German occupier had chosen Bruges as the centre of its wireless interception activities in northern France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The function of the Ter Linden establishment was to intercept and decode enemy naval wireless traffic. Its main task was to monitor Royal Navy radio transmissions from surface vessels. Contrary to what is often said, the base had hardly anything to do with submarine warfare. The interception and decoding work was taken up in the latter half of 1941, but the base did not become fully operational until January 1942.

The unit manning it was officially known as the Marine-Peil-Abteilung Flandern (Naval Monitoring Division Flanders), and made up of three companies: the 1. Kompanie, comprising the personnel of the Ter Linden facility which was known as Marine-Peil-Hauptstelle Brügge (Naval Monitoring Main Station Bruges); the 2. Kompanie, comprising the personnel of the Marine-Peil-Nebenstellen (Naval Monitoring Sub-Stations) at the subsidiary listening posts at Den Helder, Scheveningen, Maassluis and Hoek van Holland (in the Netherlands), Middelkerke (in Belgium), and Boulogne-sur-Mer, Le Touquet, Dieppe and Etretat (in France); and a Stabskompanie (staff company) in Bruges made up of the watch-keeping and administrative personnel. The unit answered directly to the Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine (Naval High Command, OKM) in Berlin. Twice daily, a messenger left Bruges for Berlin to deliver among other things a copy of the radio interception report.

The marchers pass through Varsenare, a village three miles south-west of Bruges.

The marchers have gone but the house at No. 136 Gistelse Steenweg is still there. Today it is the De Notelaar Restaurant.

Left: **From 1943, the Marinehelferinnen (female naval auxiliaries) had their canteen at château Bloemenoord in St Michiels. Here a group of them assemble outside to walk together to Ter Linden for their eight-hour shift. The girls were allowed to wear civilian coats but had to carry helmets and gas masks at all times — although many used the mask container as handbags for personal items. Second from left is Rosemargrit Lohmann, the daughter of Vizeadmiral Walter Lohmann, who was commander of the Kriegsmarine Officer School at Mürwik from October 1939 to September 1942 and thereafter of the Kriegsmarine-Dienststelle Hamburg.** *Right:* **Rosemargrit Lohmann and her friend Hans Hermann Schmitt-Kramer (himself an Afrikakorps veteran) pictured at the same spot during a return visit to Bruges in May 2001. Bloemenoord is today in use as St Michiels' town hall.**

Marinehelferin Anita Bindig on duty at the telephone switchboard in the gatehouse.

In order to establish the bearing of enemy radio traffic, the Germans used an improved version of the Adcock radio direction finder, named after the English inventor F. E. Adcock. The apparatus was placed in an underground concrete chamber of three by three metres (which still exists today, albeit filled up with earth). With the help of four antennae on the surface, positioned in a cross and facing all four points of the compass, it was possible to find the direction of the original message. In co-operation with the various sub-stations along the Atlantic coast, one could determine the position of ships and follow their movements. The actual radio messages were intercepted using American-built receivers and three antennae erected on the lawn in front of the château. Day and night, teams of 20 operators sat on eight-hour shifts listening and noting the bearings. Each team included linguists and decoders.

In deciphering the coded messages, German Naval Intelligence had an advantage over their English rivals thanks to research carried out before the war by the future Kapitän-zur-See Heinz Bonatz, chief of the naval command's communications and intelligence branch. From 1934 to 1939, Bonatz had analysed British naval radio traffic and succeeded in discovering its pattern. Thus, at the outbreak of hostilities, the Germans knew the form, structure, time schedule and frequencies of Royal Navy wireless messages and could apply this knowledge to the deciphering process. By decoding and extrapolating certain information that was contained in every message, such as the name of the ship, her course and speed, wind speed, etc, one could sometimes read the entire message.

The game began every morning before six o'clock when the British meteorological ships transmitted their daily message according to a fixed format. The beginning of each message contained a group of letters such as 'loxo', 'loxod' and 'loxon', which indicated the decoding key. This key was changed every 24 hours. The coded name of a Royal Navy ship always consisted of a number (indicating the type of ship) followed by two or three letters.

Marinehelferin Ellen Schäffer at work listening in on British naval radio traffic in the Monitoring Room of the castle. A rare picture, as the taking of private snapshots inside the castle was strictly forbidden.

Right: **Oberfunkmaate (Junior NCOs) Heinz Schmutzler (left) and Rolf Glave (right) about to board motor torpedo boat *T3* for another wireless interception mission aboard ship. The picture was taken at Le Havre in 1942. Glave is carrying the secret decoding keys in a briefcase weighted down with lead, to be thrown overboard in case of emergency. Note the special monitoring aerials mounted on top of the bridge of *T3*.**

The expert personnel of Ter Linden also carried out missions at sea aboard E-Boats (German motor torpedo boats), minesweepers and minelayers. One notable example was their employment during Operation 'Cerberus', the successful break-out of the German battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* with the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* from Brest to Germany in February 1942. The E-Boats operated mostly at night between the Hook of Holland and Le Havre, the Ter Linden men endeavouring to supply the boat's captain with 'on-line' information concerning the position, course, speed, number and battle signals of enemy vessels in their sector. (For example the enemy signal '4U' signified 'I am firing a torpedo'.) Three of the unit's radio-telegraphers were killed in action aboard the E-Boats *Iltis* and *Seeadler*, sunk on May 13, 1942 after a fierce battle with Royal Navy MTBs. The huts in the château grounds bore their names.

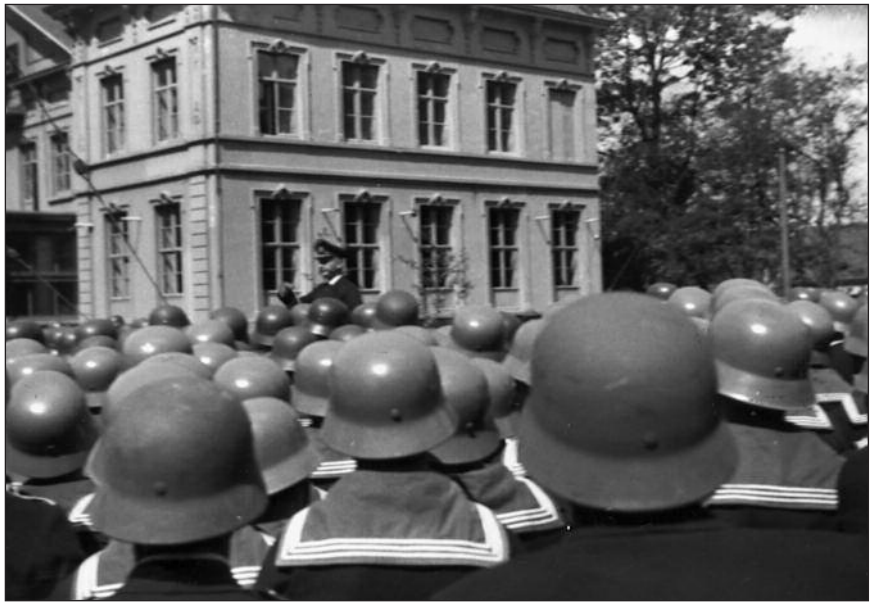
The first commanding officer of Ter Linden was Korvettenkapitän Ernst Jäckel. In May 1942 he was promoted but relieved of his position at the same time, apparently because he had had the bunkers in the château grounds built without waiting for authorisation from higher up. His successor was Fregattenkapitän Lothar von Heimburg. More than 300 officers and ratings and around 80 female naval auxiliaries worked at the base.

For accommodation, the Germans had requisitioned several châteaux in the neighbourhood. The officers were billeted in château De Berken in St Michiels, but also used a large villa named Vijverhof, situated in Parklaan on the bank of a nice lake. The NCOs and other ranks were in huts in the Ter Linden grounds, but also had the use of château Vogelzang a few hundred yards further down the road. The auxiliaries were accommodated in château Bloemenoord on Rijselstraat.

In 1943, Grossadmiral Karl Dönitz, the commander-in-chief of the Kriegsmarine, visited the base during a routine inspection, addressing the assembled personnel on the lawn. Other visitors included Generaladmiral Wilhelm Marschall, the commander of Marine-Gruppenkommando West (German Naval Command in the West) from September 1942 to April 1943, and Konteradmiral Friedrich Frisius, commander of the Pas-de-Calais naval sector from December 1941 to October 1944.

Above: **From January 15, 1942, the officers stationed at Ter Linden were billeted in a requisitioned château in St Michiels called De Berken. This group photo was taken there in 1943. First row (L-R): Riemer, Kamplade, Kollmann, Kreidel (the base's Lufwaffe liaison officer), Hengst, Herwig and Pietschke. Second row: Jappes, Mörsch, Eggers, Neuhäuser, Thomas, Kapitänleutnant Hans Breuss (commander of 1. Kompanie), Rührmann, Fregattenkapitän Lothar von Heimburg (base commander), Kapitän Dr Middell (von Heimburg's second-in-command), Weis, Riecke and Hohbohm. Von Heimburg's dog sits in front.** *Left:* **Heavily damaged by the 1944 bombing but completely restored in the years after the war, the institute at No. 196 Rijselstraat became the Kindje Jezus Gesticht, a medico-pedagogical institute. Today it is named Ter Dreve.**

Above: **The guard of honour and band (the latter supplied by the Army) mounted at Ter Linden for the visit of Grossadmiral Karl Dönitz, commander-in-chief of the Kriegsmarine, in 1943. They are standing along the driveway just inside the gatehouse. During the 1940-41 construction period, the Germans had changed the original porch entrance in the western façade into an extra room (see the picture on page 42), hence the doors at the rear visible in this picture became the main entrance.** *Right:* **The site of the château is now occupied by the villa on the south-western corner of Expressweg and Wittemolenstraat.**



Dönitz addressing the assembled personnel. He is standing next to the rigging cables of one of the three 40-metre masts. Behind him the south façade of the château.

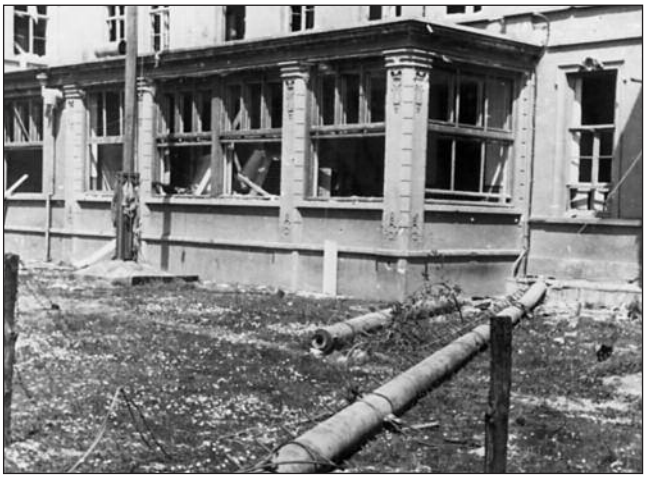
A bench now conveniently marks the spot of Dönitz's rostrum.

On May 28, 1944, 144 US Eighth Air Force bombers and 11 RAF rocket-firing Typhoons carried out a devastating attack on the Ter Linden establishment, which at the same time hit equally hard on the civilian population of St Michiels. This vertical photo was taken from one of the A-20 Havoc bombers of the 409th Bomb Group during the first attack. Bombs can be seen exploding in the château grounds, but also on the other side of Koning Albertlaan, where they are hitting the civilian houses on Rijselstraat, and along the Torhoutse Steenweg to the north. We have indicated the locations of the two Adcock (range direction finder) antennae masts located on separate plots outside the château perimeter. (Via N. Schillewaert)

On May 28, 1944 — Whitsunday — Ter Linden was the target of an Allied air raid. A total of 144 American aircraft of the Eighth Air Force (out of 190 that had taken off) — 76 A-20 Havocs from the 416th and 409th Bomb Groups and 68 B-26 Marauders from the 322nd and 386th Bomb Groups — blasted the area around the château with 190 tonnes of bombs. In between, 11 Typhoons of No. 184 Squadron, RAF (out of 12 sent out) attacked the castle, firing 88 60lb rocket projectiles. The attack came in two waves, the first, comprising the Havocs and the Typhoons, arriving between 1218 and 1241 hours and surprising the Germans during lunch. The second by the Marauders came in seven hours later, at 1907 hours. The initial attack had been intentionally timed to hit both the equipment and the qualified and experienced personnel.

When the first bombs exploded, the soldiers who had been eating in their huts hurried outside while behind them the fire extinguishers fell from their wall fixtures blowing out foam uncontrollably. The men found shelter in the bomb-proof bunkers which were only a few metres away, but the wooden huts were nothing but smoking ruins after the second bombardment. One sailor, Hans Österreich, who was celebrating his 26th birthday that day, did not reach the shelters and was killed. Gilberta Puype, a 20-year-old girl from Bruges, who had been pressed into service as kitchen waitress, fainted and was carried to a shelter by the Germans. She returned home to St Michiels six months later after having been treated for her burns in hospital. Kapitänleutnant Hans Breuss, commander of the 1. Kompanie, was at work behind his desk on the first floor of the château in the newly-built northern wing. An explosion threw him outside, along with his desk, yet he survived.

The bombardment all but wrecked the facility. The château itself was severely hit, both the new northern wing and the pre-war southern one collapsing in a heap of rubble. All the wooden huts burned to the ground



These two pictures, taken by a German soldier, are extraordinary because they show the scene between the first attack which hit shortly after noon, and the second which came in the early evening. *Left:* This is the northern wing of the château, the one added by the Germans in 1940-41. The gaping hole on the first floor is in fact the office from where Kapitänleutnant Breuss, the 1. Kompanie commander, came crashing down with his desk. In a few hours' time, the whole of this wing will be completely destroyed by the second wave of bombers. Unaware of what is still in store, a soldier on guard poses beside one of the bomb craters. *Above:* The old porch entrance, converted into an extension of the Monitoring Room by the Germans, after the first attack. In the foreground one of the 40-metre masts brought down by the bombing.

and all the aerials were knocked down. Bomb craters pockmarked the whole area, the largest measuring 30 metres in diameter. Only the concrete shelters had withstood the attacks well, saving the life of those who reached them in time. In the adjacent area, about 85 civilian houses were destroyed and another 150 made uninhabitable. Casualties were heavy. On the German side, 21 had been killed and 23 wounded. The civilian population of Bruges suffered 40 dead and 47 injured.

The result of the second wave. The northern wing has now been totally flattened, the old porch has suffered further damage, and the whole southern wing, part of the original château building, has been demolished. This picture, taken by local photographer Georges Manertz in September 1944, gives a good view of the tall chimney added by the Germans on the outside in 1941. Note the Waffenbunker in the right background.

The remains of the NCO's and other ranks' hut as it looked after the raid. All that is left standing are the chimney and cold water storage tank for the kitchen. Note the fire-ravaged beds on the left. Another picture by Georges Manertz.

Left: **After the air raid, the Kriegsmarine personnel of Ter Linden were transferred to the military barracks in Bruges. Here Fregattenkapitän von Heimburg presents his men to Konteradmiral Friedrich Frisius, the Seekommandant Pas-de-Calais (naval commander Pas-de-Calais sector).** *Right:* **The former Majoor Weyler Barracks on Hugo Losschaertstraat is today in use as a school.**

The elimination of Ter Linden was part of the military preparations for the Normandy landings, which took place nine days later. That same evening, a number of key persons were transferred to the reserve base at the Groenenberg château near Brussels, where there was another installation similar to that at Ter Linden, the balance of the personnel following the next morning. Later that year, as a result of the Allied advance into Belgium, the unit was moved to Groningen in northern Holland, where in April 1945 its members participated in the final defence of the town against the Canadians.

Today, nothing remains of the Ter Linden château. Its ruin was never officially pulled down, but all of it was gradually taken away to rebuild the bomb-damaged houses in the adjacent area. Leaving the E40 motorway at the Bruges exit, at the top of the third set of traffic lights on the highway, one passes the site where the château once stood. In a corner of the highway lay-by and the Witte Molenstraat one can still see three concrete constructions. These pillboxes, now wholly covered in shrubbery, are the last remains of the defence perimeter around the wartime naval base.

The only vestiges remaining of the Kriegsmarine base today are three small pillboxes. This one stands on the corner of Wittemolenstraat and Graaf Pierre de Brieylaan, some 300 metres to the south-west of the former château. There were 33 such MG nests guarding the base's perimeter.

For help in the preparation of this article, the author would like to thank former German personnel at Ter Linden: Ernst Beau, Erwin Fastbinder, Folkert Koch, Rosemargrit Lohmann, Erwin Merz, Maria Sehn, Werner Richter, Georg Schatz, Jochen Schindler, Heinz Schmutzler, Hermann Terstappen and Gräfin Ilse zu Rantzau. Others who helped were Gaby Alloo, Luitenant A. J. Canale, Julien De Bysere, Georges Manertz, Gilberta Puype, Hugo Vandekeere and Michel Van Maele.

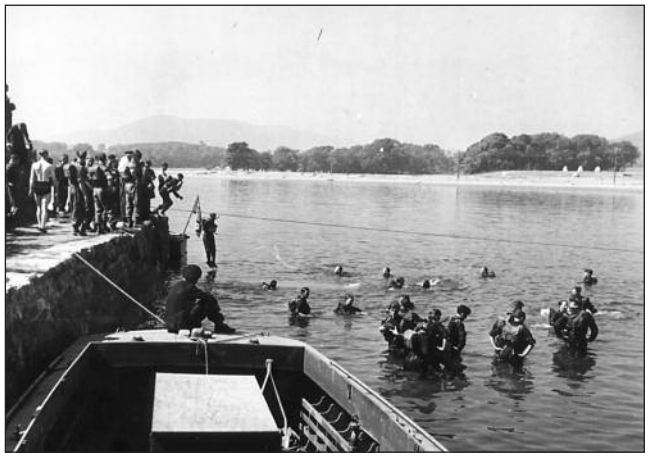
The Combined Training Centre at Castle Toward (HMS *Brontosaurus*) was located at Toward Point, six miles south of Dunoon on the Clyde opposite Rothesay on the Isle of Bute. This tri-service training establishment was under the command of a Captain RN with instructors provided by the navy, army and air force. The principal role of the school was to train officers and men of all three services in the techniques of loading the various types of landing craft, followed by disembarkation and assault landings over the beaches. This training was in preparation for the landings that subsequently took place at Dieppe, North Africa and Normandy. The facilities were also made available to Allied forces. Our author, Lieutenant-Colonel Peyman, was a member of the wartime training staff. He recalls: 'In September 1942, a course was run for US officers who are seen here in a photograph I took at the entrance to Duntroon Castle, Crinan, Argyl. The very relaxed attitude of some of the students is accounted for by the fact that the mess truck had just arrived with the haversack rations for the mid-day meal.'

CTC CASTLE TOWARD

By Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Peyman

After the British withdrawal from France in June 1940, Prime Minister Winston Churchill ordered that an intensive study should be made of amphibious warfare. A Combined Operations Headquarters was established in Richmond Terrace, Whitehall, where planning took place for the setting up of training centres for the return of Allied forces to occupied Europe.

Colonel Peyman: 'I was at Castle Toward from June 1942 to September 1943, and revisited Duntroon Castle in July 1996. I was pleased to find that even after a lapse of some 60 years, the surrounding countryside still remained largely unchanged.'



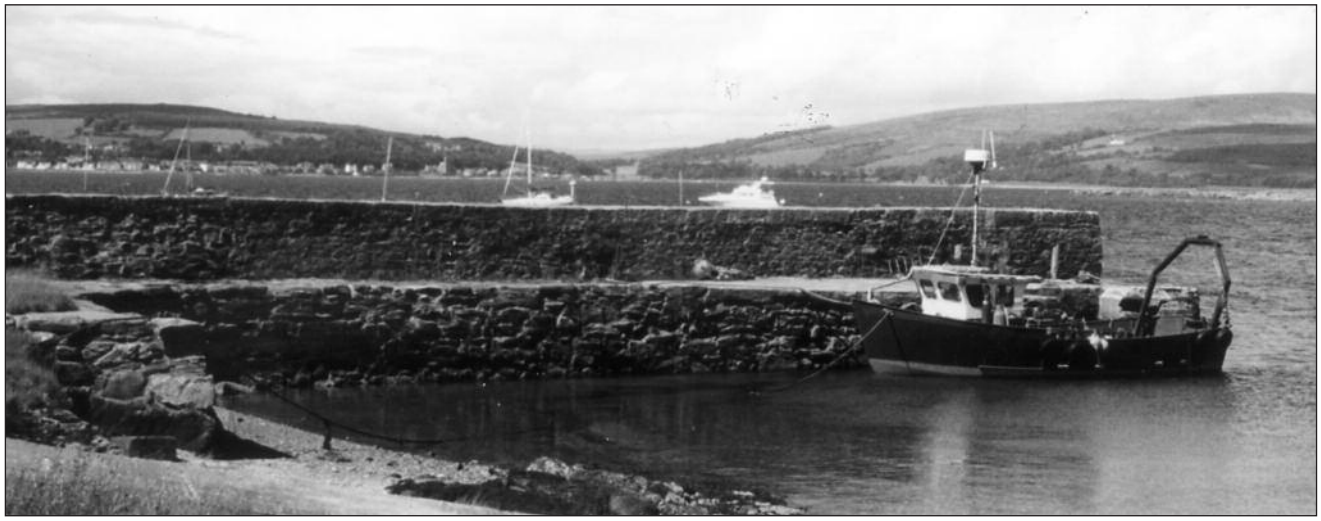
All ranks were taught to have confidence in their 'Mae West' life jackets. They were assembled on the jetty at Castle Toward where they jumped into the sea and swam to the shore. Colonel Peyman returned again in September 2000 and took these comparisons to his wartime shots. Since the 1950s Castle Toward has been involved in organising 'adventure training' and other educational activities for young boys and girls, with more than 100,000 children passing through its portals.

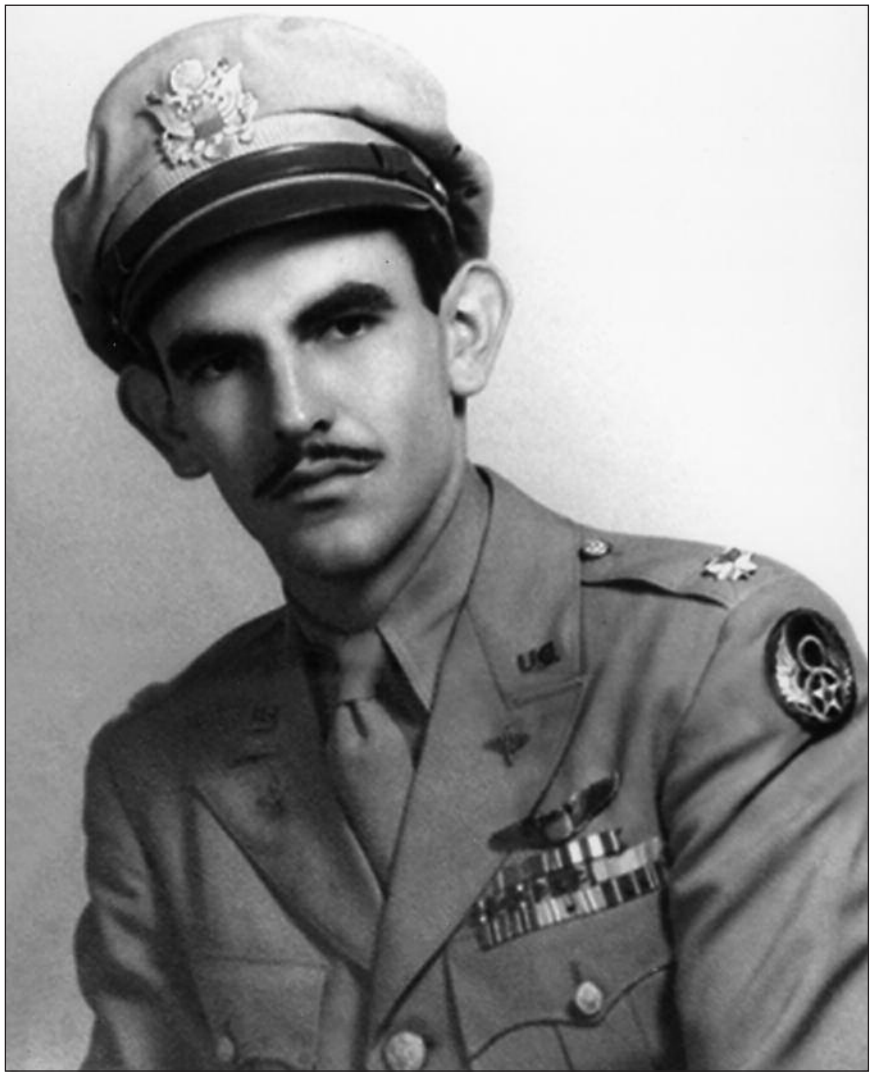
This very soon led to the creation of both single-service training centres and tri-service combined training centres (CTCs). In due course some 40 establishments were set up, approximately half being located on the west coast of Scotland and the remainder on the south coast of England. The Commandos set up their single-service training centre at Achnacarry, north of Fort William, while the RN Beach Commandos located their training establishment at Glenfinnart House on Loch Long. Amongst the most important tri-service CTCs were those at Inveraray and Lochailort in the Western Highlands of Argylshire, and Castle Toward located on the Clyde six miles south of Dunoon on the promontory opposite Rothesay.

The naval and army wings of each centre had a specific training role. At Lochailort the army wing concentrated on training infantry soldiers, while at Castle Toward the army wing trained units of the other arms: Royal Engineers, Royal Artillery, Royal Armoured Corps, and other logistic units. Here one of the principal roles of the school was to instruct officers and men in the techniques of loading personnel, tanks, and wheeled vehicles onto the various forms of landing craft, followed by disembarkation and assault landings over the beaches. In addition, naval beachmasters were taught to control the beaches and assist in the dispersal of troops inland. Those in command of units of the logistic services were exercised in setting up onshore storage areas for all forms of supplies: ammunition, petrol, rations, etc. Another speciality was the instruction given to the drivers of vehicles on how to waterproof the engines of tanks and trucks.

Courses at many of the training establishments were also run for Britain's allies, in particular the Canadians and Americans. The training received by the British and Allied forces played a vital part in the successful landings in North Africa in November 1942, Sicily in 1943, and Normandy in June 1944.

It is interesting to note that since 1950 Castle Toward has been very active in the training of young boys and girls in adventure training, and other educational activities. Students have come not only from the UK but also many European countries since the school opened after the war.





THE DEATH OF GEORGE PREDDY

By Roger Freeman

Every family that has lost a loved one in war earns the sympathy of its nation, albeit of little consolation to grieving parents and siblings. Where more than one member of the same family gave their lives the loss is particularly grievous, and in both the First and Second World Wars there were many such instances. In American military cemeteries the graves of brothers are often found side by side. This results from guidelines set by Congress in 1946 whereby the Quartermaster Corps, at that time responsible for military burials, could allow an appointed relative of the deceased to decide on a final resting place. The relative, usually a parent, often requested brothers killed in the same theatre of operations to be placed in the same cemetery in adjacent graves. One of the most poignant examples is to be found in the American military cemetery at St Avold, France, where two Eighth Air Force fighter pilot brothers are to be found side by side, George and William Preddy (see *After the Battle* No. 75). Both lost their lives through anti-aircraft ground fire. George — at the time a leading fighter ace — to gun-fire from his own side.

The Preddys were a typical stable middle-class family residing in Greensboro, North Carolina. Earl Preddy worked as a freight train conductor for the local railroad company; an industrious man, he was never out of work during the depression and owned his house. Of the four children with which he and his wife Clara were blessed, the eldest and third born were girls, Jonnice and Rachel. The first boy was George Earl, born on February 5, 1919, and his brother William on July 20, 1924. All were very family orientated and particularly close to their mother.

Young George — his father was also George Earl but preferred to be known as Earl — left school in 1935 and worked in a cotton mill. He had become fascinated by aircraft and aviation, eventually taking flying lessons and investing $75 as a half-share in the ownership of a worn Waco 10 biplane. With this aircraft George engaged in summer barn-storming displays around the state when not studying at a small local college. The latter was to obtain the necessary educational qualifications essential to being accepted for military aviation which had become George's desired career. An attempt to join naval aviation failed on medical grounds although for no serious reasons. At this time — 1939 — the US Navy had only limited pilot requirements so selection centred on young men with the finest physique. George was not large in stature, about 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighed around 120 pounds (8½ stone).

Still intent on getting into military aviation, the following year he passed the entrance examinations for the Army Air Corps only to learn that acceptance could not be fulfilled for some months as there was a waiting list of successful candidates. Meanwhile he was persuaded to enlist in the National Guard which would cover the basic training afforded all soldier recruits and speed his entry into flying training once called into Air Corps' service.

Some seven months elapsed before George finally received orders to report for flying training and assessment, this at two civilian flying schools in Georgia operating on an Air Corps contract. As well as being a self-disciplined and purposeful individual, George was both sensitive and studious and met all requirements for advanced training as a fighter pilot and he graduated from Craig Field, Alabama, in the week following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Assigned to the 9th Pursuit Squadron of the 49th Pursuit Group (later renamed Fighter Group) at West Palm Beach, Florida, within a month of his graduation he moved with the squadron to San Francisco from where he sailed on the impressed cruise liner *Mariposa* on January 12, 1941. The destination was Australia and the ship arrived at

Top: **George Preddy, the most successful Mustang pilot in the European Theater of Operations, was slight and soft spoken, the moustache being grown during the voyage to Australia in January 1942. His former squadron commander, John C. Meyer, described him as 'a core of steel in a largely sentimental soul.'** *Above:* **The Preddy family home on Park Avenue in Greensboro, North Carolina.**

Melbourne on February 1. After two weeks in the city the squadron moved to an airbase near Sydney where it was eventually equipped with Curtiss P-40Es. These fighters were generally known as Kittyhawks which was the name used by the Royal Australian Air Force. George Preddy, like several of the other pilots, had no experience of flying the P-40 and little on other fighter types. Intensive training followed and early in March 1942 the squadron was moved north to the Darwin area and almost immediately was in action in the defence of that town from sporadic Japanese bombing raids (see *After the Battle* No. 67).

The Kittyhawk was a good aircraft but was not as manoeuvrable as the Japanese fighters it encountered and above 15,000 feet its performance declined due to no effective supercharging. Although the Japanese Zeros had a far superior high-altitude performance, they tended to operate at lower levels to better protect the bombers from interception. The advised methods of interception by the Kittyhawks, if sufficient advanced warning was forthcoming, was to gain as much altitude as possible and then attack the enemy fighters in a dive.

The 49th Group saw plenty of action over the next few months, George being involved in a few dogfights, claiming two enemy aircraft damaged. Then on July 13, while simulating an enemy bomber during a training exercise, the pilot of one of the attacking Kittyhawks apparently misjudged his dive and struck George's aircraft. From the disintegrating wrecks only George managed to escape by parachute and, although he landed safely, he was severely injured. The next three months were spent in hospital convalescing and when ready to return to his squadron George received orders posting him back to the United States.

Following leave and unpopular assignments, he finally managed to get transferred to the 34th Fighter Squadron (later redesignated as the 487th Fighter Squadron) of the 352nd Fighter Group at Westover Field, Massachusetts.

The squadron was training with P-47 Thunderbolts and scheduled for overseas commitment which was what George sought. Pilots who had seen combat in the South-West Pacific Area — such as Joe Kuzel, Stanley Woods and John Landers who had fought with the 49th Fighter Group — were to be found in this and several of the new groups formed to raise experience levels of the units, and all later went to Europe and further distinction.

No doubt influenced by his elder brother, William Preddy was eager to become a pilot and was accepted for training soon after his 18th birthday. By late 1942 qualifying was not the difficult task it had been for George as the rapidly expanding Army Air Forces were in urgent need of thousands of airmen. Like George, William was dark-haired but of larger physique and taller. He commenced his ground training in Florida in February 1943 and, although successful in being selected for pilot training, several months elapsed before the overloaded system could take him for primary instruction. His hope was to get into fighters and perhaps join his brother.

George's brother William. Five years younger than his famous brother and of larger stature, 'Bill' showed the same spirit of determination to succeed.

In the spring of 1943 the 352nd Fighter Group was deemed ready to move overseas but shortage of shipping space and a dearth of P-47s in the intended destination — Britain — delayed departure from New York until July. On arrival the group was stationed at Bodney in Norfolk, a grass-surfaced airfield in a fairly remote area (see *Airfields of the Eighth Then and Now*). However, it was several weeks before sufficient Thunderbolts were on hand to fully equip the three

George with his assistant crew chief 'Red' McVay at Bodney in July 1944 . . . and after his six-victory sortie the following month.

Left: **Welcome home Major George Preddy! After that six-in-one feat on August 6, George was given leave to return to the States. Here he is welcomed home by his family: his sister (Mrs Rachel Harris) and his father and mother.** *Right:* **George's summer uniform, which he is seen wearing in the wartime picture, is now on display in Greensboro Historical Museum.**

squadrons of the group which did not commence operations until September. On December 1 George shot down his first German aircraft, an Me 109 caught trying to attack a bomber formation. This was the first of three Luftwaffe fighters he destroyed while flying P-47s, the third being an FW 190 brought down on January 29, 1944. Coming out of enemy-held territory at low level, his Thunderbolt was hit by flak, the engine eventually failing over the Channel. Before bailing out, George was able to give Air/Sea Rescue his position and an RAF Walrus amphibian landed and picked him up. At that time of year, the average life expectancy in the cold North Sea was around three minutes and, even though George managed to get into his dinghy, it was an hour before rescue arrived which says much for his constitution as he returned to flying combat within two days.

In April the 352nd Fighter Group converted to P-51B Mustangs and with this type an impressive record of enemy aircraft destroyed both in the air and by strafing those found on airfields began to mount up. Flying Mustangs, George was credited with shooting down five aircraft during April and May 1944 by which time he had completed 300 hours, the normal 200-hour operational tour plus two 50-hour extensions. Further extensions were not so easily granted by VIII Fighter Command but, as George showed no signs of fatigue and the 352nd Fighter Group needed to retain his experience, another 50-hour extension was obtained. This enabled George to build up his score with another 14 enemy aircraft credited to him plus two shared. Three of these and a probable were shot down on July 18 when the squadron chanced upon a large formation of Ju 88s escorted by Me 109s. But on August 6 he made history as far as the European Theater of Operations was concerned by claiming six aircraft destroyed in air combat during one mission. This record was achieved when his flight intercepted a large number of Me 109s preparing to attack a formation of B-17s east of Berlin.

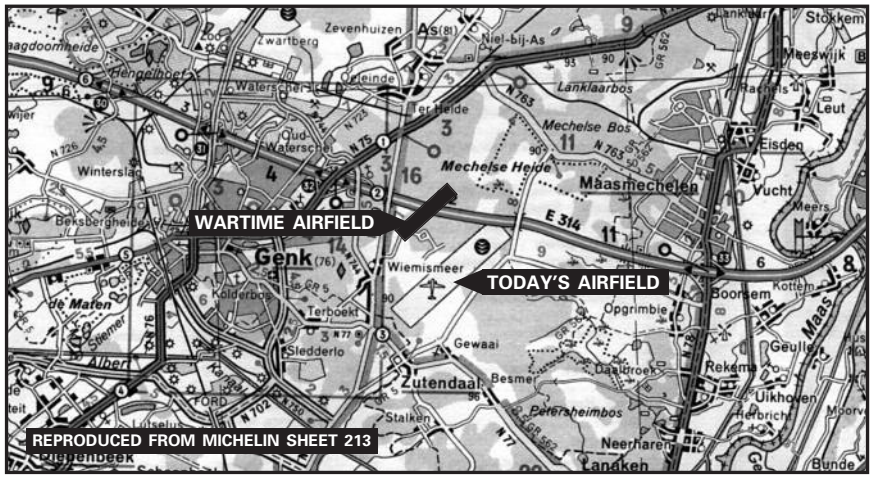
With a total of nearly 400 combat hours, Major Preddy returned to the United States a fêted hero. Nevertheless, he announced his intention of returning to his unit after his leave, a facility granted to most worthy fighter pilots to enable a high level of experience to be maintained in their unit.

During the time he spent at home, George announced his engagement to a girl he had known in Australia, Joan Jackson. With his dark hair and moustache George was a striking young man who attracted the fair sex and, while he enjoyed female company, he was true to Joan with whom he had kept up regular correspondence. Also during his leave he paid a visit to brother Bill, then in advanced training at Venice, Florida. The brothers even had an opportunity to engage in a mock dogfight with P-40s, Bill proving a very able pilot. He told George that he cherished the wish to join him in England when his training was completed.

George returned to Britain in October and was given command of the 328th Fighter Squadron, a sister unit to the 487th in the 352nd Fighter Group, still based at Bodney. The first mission of his second tour took place on October 30, 1944 when he led the squadron on an escort task to Merseburg but the operation had to be abandoned because of appalling weather. On November 2, when the bombing force was detailed to attack oil targets there, the 352nd was involved in heavy air fighting claiming 24 aircraft shot down, George being responsible for one of them. During the following weeks, there was little opportunity to engage in further combat as a long period of low cloud and freezing conditions descended over north-west Europe. It was during this period of restricted air cover that the Germans launched their ground offensive through the Ardennes. To meet the attack, two Eighth Air Force fighter groups were moved to the Continent, the 361st from Little Walden and the 352nd. On the morning of December 23, the 352nd's Mustangs moved to landing

This photo was taken after George returned to England in October 1944. With him is Major John C. Meyer, commander of the 487th Fighter Squadron, who eventually commanded the 352nd Fighter Group. After the war, Meyer became a four-star General and was Vice-Chief of Staff for the USAF in the late 1960s.

When the 352nd Fighter Group moved from Bodney to the Continent on December 23, 1944, they were assigned to an advanced landing ground which had been built just east of Genk in Belgium, although it was named after the village of Asch (now As) to the north. Its code reference was Y-29. The present-day airfield, built by the Belgians in the 1950s and known as Zutendaal Airbase, lies a 1,000 yards south of the wartime airfield. Vacated by the Belgian Air Force in 2002, it is now an army base.



ground Y-29 at Asch in Belgium. The three squadrons were to operate independently during daylight, each being replaced by another squadron after approximately four hours flying so as to provide constant air patrols over the battlefield.

On Christmas Eve George led his squadron on an uneventful four-hour patrol on which visibility was severely restricted by low cloud and haze during which no enemy contacts were made. Most fighter pilots acknowledged that luck inevitably played a part in their lives and George was no exception. The next day his luck ran out.

The 352nd shared Y-29 with the 366th Fighter Group of the Ninth Air Force which had arrived here from A-70 Laon/ Couvron in France on November 19. These Thunderbolts belong to the 389th and 390th Squadrons of the 366th Group. The view is to the north-west, the slag heap visible in the far distance being that of Waterschei north of Genk. (H. N. Holt)

Above: **The only traces of Y-29 remaining today are stretches of the perimeter track — the rest of the airfield site has been planted over by fir trees. The Y-29 memorial (see back cover), unveiled in 1984, stands at the south-western end of the former runway. Although outside the guarded perimeter of the present-day military base proper, the memorial is still on military property and access to it is restricted. On April 10, 2003, a party of American veterans visited Zutendaal to lay wreaths and included in the party was a cousin of Preddy, Joe Noah** *(right).* **(R. Putz)**

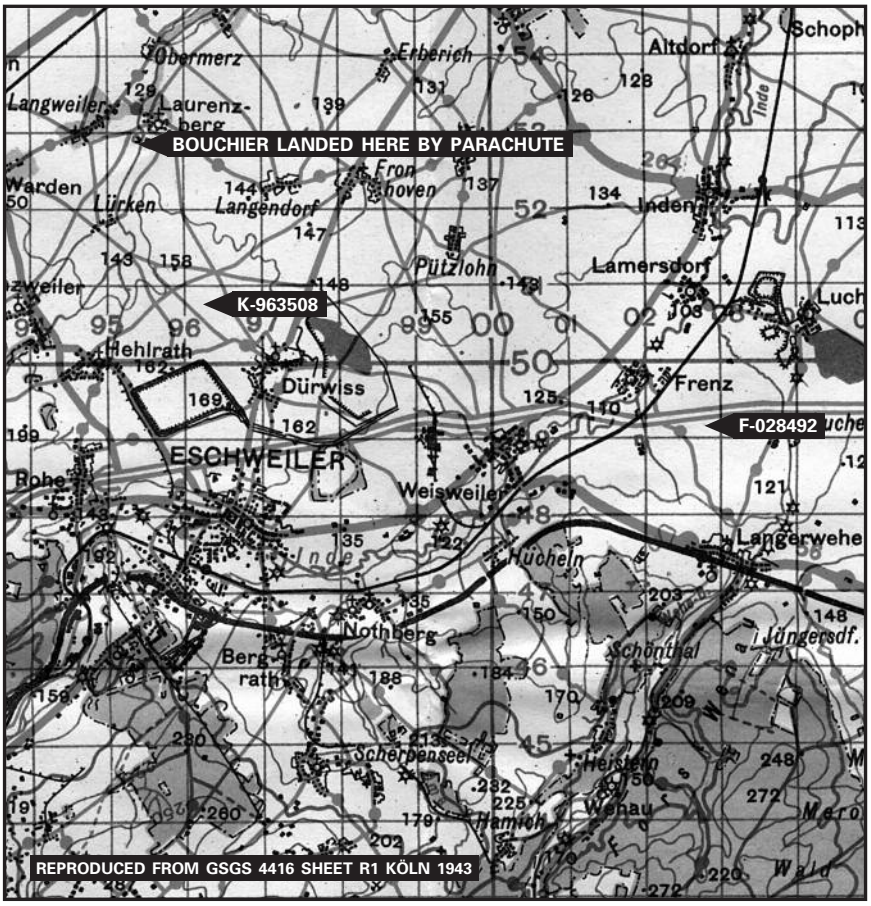
George Preddy met his death on Christmas Day 1944 in this Mustang. A P-51D-15-NA, serial number 44-14906 with the squadron code PE-P, it carried the name *Cripes A'Mighty* as had his two previously assigned Mustangs and a Thunderbolt. Cripes a'mighty was an expression frequently used by George.

THE FINAL MISSION

On Christmas Day the 352nd Fighter Group was directed to carry out patrols on a squadron basis on a line west of Aachen. The 328th Fighter Squadron, scheduled to fly the second patrol of the day, was briefed by Major Preddy and his staff for take-off at 0940 hours. The Major joked about wearing his 'Fighting Socks', which were scarlet and something of a good luck token. This was to be his 143rd combat operation and up to this time he had amassed 532 combat hours flying in Australia and Europe.

The usual requirement for these patrols was a 12-plane formation but on this occasion only ten aircraft were available. Immediately after take-off from Asch and forming up into flights, the squadron conducted a high-speed climb so as not to be at a disadvantage if intercepted. Levelling off at 15,000 feet, the flights spread out into battle formation and commenced patrolling on a reciprocal course.

Operating under MEW control (Microwave Early Warning — the short range radar installation that covered the immediate battle area), the first three hours of the mission were fairly uneventful. At first the day was clear of clouds although visibility was restricted by mist. Periodically a check was made with the MEW controller but radio communication was poor and sometimes broken. At approximately 1140 hours a vector was received to turn towards Koblenz on the Rhine where enemy aircraft were attempting to intercept Allied bombers. Preddy immediately headed for the area, climbing his squadron to gain altitude. When some miles south-west of Koblenz, two groups of Me 109s were seen at a lower altitude and down-sun. With the advantage of surprise, Preddy led his White Flight down to attack. As he was closing on one fighter, another suddenly crossed in front of him, possibly a wingman following his leader. Preddy immediately opened fire scoring hits, Preddy's wingman, Lieutenant Gorton Cartee, noting that the canopy came off the Messerschmitt followed by the pilot. Preddy then turned his attention to his original quarry and following his attack the pilot of this aircraft was also seen to bail out.



The first laconic report *(opposite)* merely stated that two P-51s had been seen to have been shot down, giving the two map references. It was ambiguous in that the AA fire was not identified as Allied or German.

SECRET

12TH AAA GROUP

AUTH: CG. XIX CORPS
INITIALS: J.A.R.
DATE: DECEMBER 25, 1944

Place: In the field
From: 2421A December 1944
To: 2521A December 1944

S-2 PERIODIC REPORT

No. 25.

1. ENEMY OPERATIONS DURING THE PERIOD

a. Air (All AA Units)

During the period, approximately 30 enemy aircraft were active over the corps forward areas, mostly on recce missions. Strafing occurred in two (2) instances. The raids were in groups of 1 and 2 planes, with the exception of one raid at 0856, consisting of 15 Me 109s. In this case the aircraft circled in the V Corps area out of our range. During the period, seven (7) aircraft were destroyed and 1 probably destroyed.

b. Ground (Corps AA Only)

None.

2. TYPES OF AIRCRAFT:

FW 190, Me 109, Me 410, Ju 88, AND Me 262 (jet propelled).

3. ENEMY AIR TACTICS:

Recce missions and three instances of strafing.

4. OTHER INFORMATION:

At 1215 555th AAA AW Bn reported seeing two (2) P-51s shot down. These planes were engaged in a dogfight with a FW 190, but were fired upon by AA fire. Coordinates of crashes, K-963508 and F-028492.

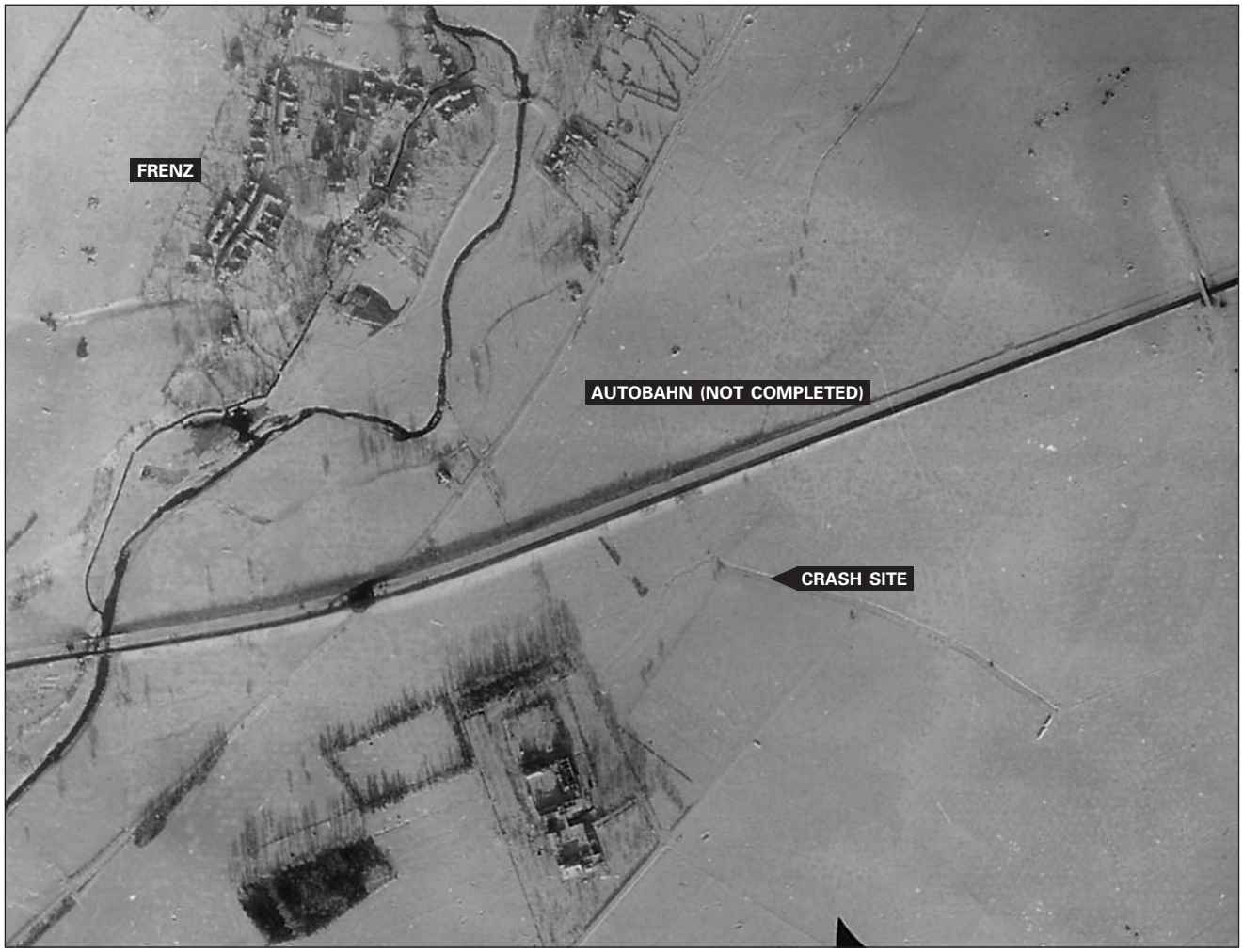
Riley

Maj., S-2

During this action Preddy and his wingman had become separated from the rest of the squadron but in climbing they were joined by 'a white-nosed' P-51, actually a silver-nosed aircraft of the 479th Fighter Group that had been heavily engaged in the same area. The pilot was Lieutenant James Bouchier. At this point Preddy received another vector, this time to the Liège area where enemy air activity was reported at low altitude. With a weather front building, the three Mustangs descended below the cloud base. Now at about 1,500 feet, they were flying north-west between Jülich and Düren, just west of the River Roer, with Lieutenant Bouchier lagging slightly behind when, at approximately 1215, a long-nosed FW 190 was seen flying east just above the treetops. Turning in behind the Focke-Wulf and increasing speed, the American pilots were suddenly confronted with anti-aircraft fire. Seeing the shell-bursts and flashing tracers, Major Preddy pulled up to the left followed by the others. Cartee then saw his leader's Mustang suddenly nose-dive when at about 700 feet in its climbing turn. It was seen to crash in open ground, cartwheel and disintegrate. Bouchier felt his aircraft take a hit and the cockpit immediately filled with smoke and after pulling up to 1,000 feet, he was forced to bail out about four miles to the west. Cartee's aircraft had also been hit but as it did not appear to have sustained critical damage, and as ground fire had ceased, he cautiously flew back over the snow-covered area to try and see if Major Preddy had survived.

Preddy's Mustang had crashed close to the anti-aircraft battery that had brought it down. Indications are that it was totally destroyed and that the pilot was killed instantly. The battery was a mobile unit of the 555th Anti-Aircraft Artillery/Automatic Weapons Battalion (a US Ninth Army non-divisional unit), believed to be Battery C equipped with 37mm guns and Maxson turret units having four 0.50-calibre Brownings. The location was just outside the village of Langerwehe, about 15 miles inside the German border on the edge of the Hürtgen Forest, an area where units of the 104th Infantry Division were dug in.

Any Allied pilot flying low near the ground battle area always ran the risk of being fired on by his own side and sadly, air-



Ron Putz carried out investigations to determine which of the two map references in the report was George Preddy's and fortunately he found a telegram in official files confirming the crash location of the second aircraft which was being flown by Lieutenant Bouchier: 'After becoming separated from squadron during combat, Bouchier joined up with two other P-51s and started home. One of the two later identified as Major Preddy, 352 Group. Flying 3-ship Vee vicinity Duren, Preddy went down to 500 feet to investigate something. Bouchier was lagging, did not observe what. Heading NW just W Roer River between Düren and Jülich, Preddy started to break left in climbing turn, then began trailing coolant. Then Bouchier observed light flak being fired at Preddy and himself. Preddy A/C dived straight in. Bouchier received a 20mm or 40mm hit in radiator at 500 feet, climbed to 1,000 feet as cockpit filled with smoke, rolled over and bailed out at 4VK9840, drifting to land at 4VK955529. Bouchier picked up and taken F/A CP Langweiler, 4VK950530. An AA battery CO telephoned to say his battery shot down two of three P51s and expressed regret; said Preddy KIA, identified by dog tags.' From this telegram it was clear that the other map reference (028492) referred to Preddy's aircraft. This vertical was taken on January 14, 1945 — three weeks after the crash on December 25, 1944. Snow cover has obliterated the crash site but it is evident that the Americans have already salvaged any surface wreckage.

craft were not infrequently shot down by friendly fire. The overriding reason was that accurate recognition of aircraft types was not easily acquired by gunners. In many cases, even after prolonged instruction, some individuals could still not instantly distinguish between friend or foe. Apart from the fact that all single-engined fighters on the Western Front were low wing, there were still substantial visual differences between the P-51 and the Me l09 and FW 190 but in this instance it appears that the gunner responsible could not even recognise a Mustang, even when it had pulled up from the head-on position and exposed more of its distinctive shape. Not only were two Mustangs shot down by this battery but another Eighth Air Force P-51 pilot was killed the same day when his aircraft was brought down by ground fire in the British sector.

When Ron Putz visited the crash site for us in March 2002 he found nothing to indicate that this field just south of the Aachen to Cologne autobahn was where the Eighth Air Force lost its leading ace. When Preddy died, he was the Eighth's top-scorer with 28 victories, this total being equalled by Lieutenant Colonel Francis S. Gabreski.

1st LT. WILLIAM R. PREDDY

As recounted by Manuel Van Eyck in *After the Battle* No. 75, George's brother Bill was killed four months later, also in the European Theater of Operations. In 1945 Bill Preddy finally achieved his wish to be assigned to the ETO and was one of a batch of freshly-trained P-51 pilots who arrived at a replacement depot in England early in January. Although he hoped to be assigned to George's unit, he was sent instead to the 339th Fighter Group at Fowlmere, just south of Cambridge (see also *Airfields of the Eighth Then and Now*). Unfortunately the report of his brother's death the previous month had not reached him and it was not until he arrived in the UK on January 22, that he was greeted with the news. It was obviously a tremendous shock and the following day he received permission to fly to Asch and talk with George's ground crew and the 352nd Fighter Group's pilots and staff.

Assigned to the 503rd Fighter Squadron of the 339th Fighter Group, Lieutenant Bill Preddy flew his first mission — a bomber escort — in early February. On March 2, he was flying as wingman to Major William Bryan, the squadron CO, when they made a successful interception of an enemy fighter formation. In the ensuing combat Bill shot down two aircraft, a significant achievement for a comparative newcomer. By now, though, the Luftwaffe was rarely met in the air and most of the subsequent action for the 339th Fighter Group was in strafing airfields.

On April 17, Lieutenant Preddy was briefed for a bomber escort and opportunist sweep to Pilzen in Czechoslovakia. A total of 55 Mustangs were despatched in three squadron formations at 1135 hours and rendezvous with the 3rd Air Division's B-17s was made at approximately 1330 hours. The escort duty was uneventful and, after being relieved by P-51s of another fighter group in the Selbat area, the 339th split into separate flights to strafe airfields that had been detailed for investigation. The 503rd Fighter Squadron went to Klatovy airfield which had previously been targetted by Mustangs of another unit where they still found four aircraft intact. The lead flight then moved on to Eisendorf where two hangars were shot up. Preddy was flying wing to Captain Raymond F. Reuter who was leading the squadron that day. At about 1440 hours Reuter and Preddy gave chase to two unidentified aircraft seen in the distance but after a few minutes reported over the radio they were turning back. However both pilots failed to return, their fates unknown until after the war had ended.

It appears that Captain Reuter decided to turn south and look for more airfield targets but by this time Luftwaffe anti-aircraft gunners in the Prague area were on the alert. When Reuter and Preddy swept over Ceske Budejovice (Budweis in German) they were met with intense and accurate fire. Reuter's Mustang took a direct hit over the airfield which caused an explosion and disintegration of the aircraft. Preddy's aircraft was also hit but apparently he was able to crash-land in a field. A 25-year-old farmer, Jan Smejkal, who saw the crash ran to the wreck and found the pilot badly injured and unconscious. He managed to pull him out of the cockpit and carry him to his horse-drawn cart for the three-mile journey to a German first aid centre. There the staff bandaged the severe injuries to head and neck that Preddy had sustained but their facilities were limited and they would not — or could not — transport the critically-injured pilot to the nearest hospital which was at Budejovice, some seven miles away. Therefore Jan Smejkal decided to take him personally so he set for the hospital with the still-unconscious pilot on his cart. Although he reached the hospital it is assumed that such were Bill Preddy's injuries that little could be done for him and that he died the next day.

Daily German Lesson — Abzeichen, Uebungsflug, Ziemlich oft

New York — London Edition — Paris

THE STARS AND STRIPES

Daily Newspaper of U.S. Armed Forces in the European Theater of Operations

VOL. 1 No. 63—Id. TUESDAY, Jan. 16, 1945

Daily French Lesson — Où habites-tu? — OO aboTAY too? — Where do you live?

Stimson Says Nazi Breakthrough Cost U.S. 40,000

Reds Roll Toward Reich Border

Yanks Near St. Vith As 1st, 3rd Join

BULLETIN

WASHINGTON, Jan. 15—U.S. losses in the area of the German breakthrough in the Ardennes totaled nearly 40,000 Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, said today.

The U.S. casualty figures include 19,000 missing, and covered the period from Dec. 15 to Jan. 7.

In the same period, 49,000 Germans were captured. German dead and wounded were estimated at 50,000, Stimson said.

U.S. casualties for the same period on the entire West Front, embracing the 1st, 3rd, 7th and 9th Armies, totaled 52,951, of whom 4,882 were killed, 27,645 wounded, the rest missing.

Units of the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division, striking from the north, were within 11 miles of the German-held road hub of Houffalize last night as the battle in the Ardennes, according to Associated Press, once again became an all-American show by the converging drives of the U.S. 1st and 3rd Armies, which have now linked up in unbroken front along the southern flank of the Belgian salient.

This was the first union of the troops of Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges, 1st Army commander, and Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, 3rd Army chief, since the German breakthrough in mid-December. British troops have previously linked up with Patton's men southeast of Liroche.

Troops of the 82nd, which entered within a mile toward Houffalize from Achouffe, 3rd Armored Division troops battled back into Cherain, six miles northeast, after having won the town in a Sunday night attack.

The Germans were fighting hard to protect the shoulders of their salient, but the Americans advanced more than half a mile against stiff resistance in their drive south from the Stavelot-Malmedy area, and were 10 miles northeast of Houffalize.

Infantrymen of the 30th Division entered Thimister, five miles below Malmedy, and the 82nd entered Lignieville, six miles from St. Vith.

On the right of the deflated bulge British units were reported to have reached the Ourthe River at several points after mopping up small groups of Germans.

As Associated Press phrased it, the British part in closing the salient now moved more to the rear, with the American forces front and rear of the bottle line.

Dispatches from New Inn, Belgium, could not say whether the Germans were pulling out

(Continued on page 4)

Ace Preddy Killed in Action

Maj. George E. Preddy, who had already shot down 23 enemy planes in the air and destroyed seven more on the ground, was killed in action Christmas Day, 8th Air Force headquarters announced yesterday.

The 25-year-old Greensboro, N.C., Mustang pilot was downed by flak while chasing an FW190 after having dived into

Maj. George E. Preddy

a dogfight with 30 enemy fighters in which he knocked down two German fighters. The score of enemy planes he shot down so far is 23. In addition, he had destroyed five more on the ground.

Preddy scored a record flight with 1 Lt. James Carter, of West Palm Beach, Fla., when they downed the eighth and ninth planes in one wild day's battle with the Luftwaffe planes. In the second engagement of that day, which was preceded by a wooded area, leaving Preddy's plane apart and downing its fifteenth enemy.

Preddy, who was a squadron commander in the 352nd Fighter Group, shared the one-day scoring record for fighter kills with Capt. William T. Whitney, also of the 352nd. They each downed six.

Hands Across the Salient—Clasped in Victory's Warmth

British and American patrols, under Field Marshal Montgomery's command, meet in Laroche, important town in the northern half of the Ardennes salient. Americans entered the town from one side, the British from the other—and they rush toward one another with outstretched hands.

Yanks Across River on Luzon; Jap Cabinet Shakeup Hinted

While Tokyo reported yesterday that 200 U.S. carrier-planes struck Formosa, off the South China coast, for the second successive day, American 6th Army forces continued to push forward and flankward from their Lingayen Gulf beachhead on Luzon, in the Philippines.

Tokyo said the Formosa raid lasted 41 hours and presumably was part of

(Continued on page 4)

Report Early Exchange Of Captive Casualties

Swiss Radio announced yesterday that an exchange of wounded U.S. and British soldier prisoners for German captive countries will be carried out this week with Swiss railways transporting the men between the Swiss-German border and Marseilles.

S and S Gets a Hand As the GIs 'Bible'

NEW YORK, Jan. 15 (ANS)—The New York Herald Tribune in a story today on combat veterans home on furlough said: "They were surprised at and fascinated about happenings in the world. The Stars and Stripes is their bible, and they explained with some pride that they are the most forward area it was always sent up with their rations, except when they were attacking."

675 Bombers Hit Nazi Rails; RAF Hits Oil

After its damaging raids on German industrial targets Sunday—planes shot down on refineries and depots pock-marked with solid fire—the 8th Air Force switched back to straight British operations yesterday when some 1,000 heavy bombers thundered through heavy flak to hammer four railroad marshalling yards in Germany.

At least 675 Thunderbolts and Mustangs swarmed around the Fortresses and Liberators as escort, but the Luftwaffe offered no opposition. Six more kills

Lifesaver

Basic Again For Luzon GIs

LUZON, Jan. 15 (ANS)—Every platoon of one American division here, except those in action in the front line, has been ordered to go through a refresher course because there now were blind and ill wounded in a recent Japanese counter-attack—and the combination, it was because they were "easy to fundamentals."

"Our boys got 32 Jap soldiers and one officer in the general raid, but we shouldn't have had a single casualty," said Brig. Gen. Joseph P. Cleland, division commander.

"They are really their fault," he explained. "They had eleven months in the jungle before they came here. The rain and forest were so thick they had to walk standing up. It was completely different from open warfare. You couldn't even hear, so the security was nothing like here.

"Even after the fighting was over we didn't have enough open space or do hard training for open warfare.

"On top of that," he continued, "they've been on this island for five days without letting any Japs, so they may have been a little overconfident.

"They won't like it, of course, but every platoon not actually in the front line will go through a refresher course."

Hap Says 'Coordination' Beats 'Air Support'

WASHINGTON, Jan. 15 (ANS)—Gen. Henry H. Arnold, head of the USAAF, suggested today that all Air Forces personnel hereafter use some phrase other than "air support" for operations in which planes serve as spearheads in advance of ground troops.

Describing "air support" as an inadequate term, Arnold proposed "air co-operation" would be more suitable.

Coal-less Paris Retires Early

By Ernest Leiser

PARIS, Jan. 15—Guy Petot? Not tonight. Not for some time to come.

That's the closing down the night clubs and cabarets in the Paris area. Turning out the lights in the store windows and closing all shops except groceries and pharmacies at 6 PM.

In addition, the supply of electric power for domestic and commercial and small trade use will be cut off between 8:30 AM and 5 PM, and tomorrow all passenger train traffic in France will be suspended.

The moves have been made by the French government in an attempt to relieve the coal shortage and the hope will be lifted as soon as sufficient coal is available.

Under present plans, movies, cafes and bars will be allowed to remain open.

Allied service clubs will stay open.

Paris soldiers said yesterday that if it proved their plans to stay off electric power during the day would include lights and in all U.S. headquarters and military installations, with the exception of Corps Z headquarters.

The General Lived at Dawn

ROME, Jan. 15 (AP)—Lt. Gen. Bernard C. Freyberg, commander of New Zealand troops in Italy, got a belated Christmas gift early Dec. 26 when a German air bomb a clod—went through his CP building, bounced over a wall and rolled to within a few yards of where he was sleeping.

Widow Wears Hero's Medal

Saved Life—Only to Lose It

WASHINGTON, Jan. 15—The Congressional Medal of Honor has been awarded posthumously to Lt. Col. Leon R. Vance, 29, who became a pre-invasion hero with the 493rd Bomb Group of the 8th Air Force, the War Department announced today.

Vance was lost in an Army evacuation plane between Iceland and Newfoundland last July. The medal will go to his widow, Mrs. Georgene Drury Vance, of Garden City, N.Y.

Vance was command pilot of a Liberator on a mission to Wismeran, France, before D-Day. Flak knocked out three of the plane's engines, killed the pilot, injured several crew members and

George's brother Bill was looking forward to being sent to Britain in the hope he would fly with his brother . . . but it was not to be. Although *Stars and Stripes* published an article on his death in the issue of January 16, 1945, not until he reached the UK was Bill told that his brother had been killed the previous month. On April 17, 1945, Bill was flying this Mustang when he met his death over Czechoslovakia (see *After the Battle* No. 75). The nickname *Rusty* was given to the aircraft D7-A by its previous pilot who had completed his operational tour.

JS

USMC, ST AVOLD, FRANCE Buried at decease
Plot A, Row 21, Grave 43 DISINTERMENT DIRECTIVE
Date reburied: 18 Jan 49

BROTHERS

SECTION A— NAME AND BURIAL LOCATION OF DECEASED

M. R. SWART
CAPT QMC

DIRECTIVE NUMBER 4650 12788

DATE 10 DAY 05 MONTH 48 YEAR

NAME	SERIAL NUMBER	RANK	ARM	DATE OF DEATH
PREDDY GEORGE E JR	O-430846	MAJ	1	DAY MONTH YEAR

CEMETERY		DISPOSITION OF REMAINS
MARGRATEN - AACHEN	1	3503 80 CODE DIST. PT.

PLOT	ROW	GRAVE	COUNTRY	CAUSE OF DEATH
O	1	3	HOLLAND	1

SECTION B— CONSIGNEE AND NEXT OF KIN

NAME AND ADDRESS OF CONSIGNEE
ST. AVOLD, FRANCE

NAME AND ADDRESS OF NEXT OF KIN
GEORGE E. PREDDY (FATHER)
[redacted]
GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA
JAN-24 1949
(Flag sent)

SECTION C— DISINTERMENT AND IDENTIFICATION

NAME	SERIAL NUMBER	RANK	DATE OF DEATH	DATE DISTINTERRED

IDENTIFICATION TAG ON	ORGANIZATION	RELIGION	IDENTIFICATION VERIFIED BY
☐ REMAINS ☐ MARKER	USAAF		NAME AND TITLE

SECTION D— PREPARATION OF REMAINS FOR SHIPMENT

NATURE OF BURIAL

CONDITION OF REMAINS

OTHER MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION
SEE ATTACHED WORK SHEET

FILE RECORDS AUTHENTICATED
DATE 1 Mar 49
NAME [illegible]
R & R Br.

MINOR DISCREPANCIES
Identification tags do not list "Jr" - Burial plaques made to agree with 1194.
REMOVED PER O.I. 147.

REMAINS PREPARED AND PLACED IN CASKET

DATE BY

CASKET SEALED BY
Richard F Peterson, Embalmer

EMBALMER (Signature)
Richard F Peterson
Richard F Peterson

CASKET BOXED AND MARKED

DATE 24 Sept 48 BY Richard F Peterson

All markings, tags and plates verified
D H Tackett, 1st Lt QMC

I hereby certify that all the foregoing operations were conducted and accomplished under my immediate supervision and that the report above is correct.

D H Tackett
D H Tackett, 1st Lt QMC, 7857 AGRC Zone 3 Hq
SIGNATURE OF GRS INSPECTOR

Prepare Discrepancy Report QMC Form 1194a for major discrepancies. RESERVE GRAVE FOR SIDE-BY-SIDE BURIAL WITH BROTHER, 1/LT. WILLIAM R. PREDDY, O-2057681, ST. AVOLD, FRANCE, PLOT-L, ROW-22, GRAVE-1693.

AERIAL VICTORIES CREDITED TO MAJOR GEORGE E. PREDDY, JR

Date	*Aircraft Type*	
Dec 1, 1943	Me 109	1
Dec 22, 1943	Me 210	1
Jan 29, 1944	FW 190	1
Apr 22, 1944	Ju 88	½
Apr 30, 1944	FW 190	1
May 13, 1944	Me 109	2
May 30, 1944	Me109	2½
June 12, 1944	Me 109	1
June 20, 1944	FW 190	1
	Me 410	½
June 21, 1944	Me 109	1
July 18, 1944	Ju 88	2
	Me 109	1
July 21, 1944	Me 109	½
July 29, 1944	Me 109	1
Aug 5, 1944	Me 109	1
Aug 6, 1944	Me 109	6
Nov 2, 1944	Me 109	1
Nov 21, 1944	FW 190	1
Dec 25, 1944	Me 109	2
	Total	28

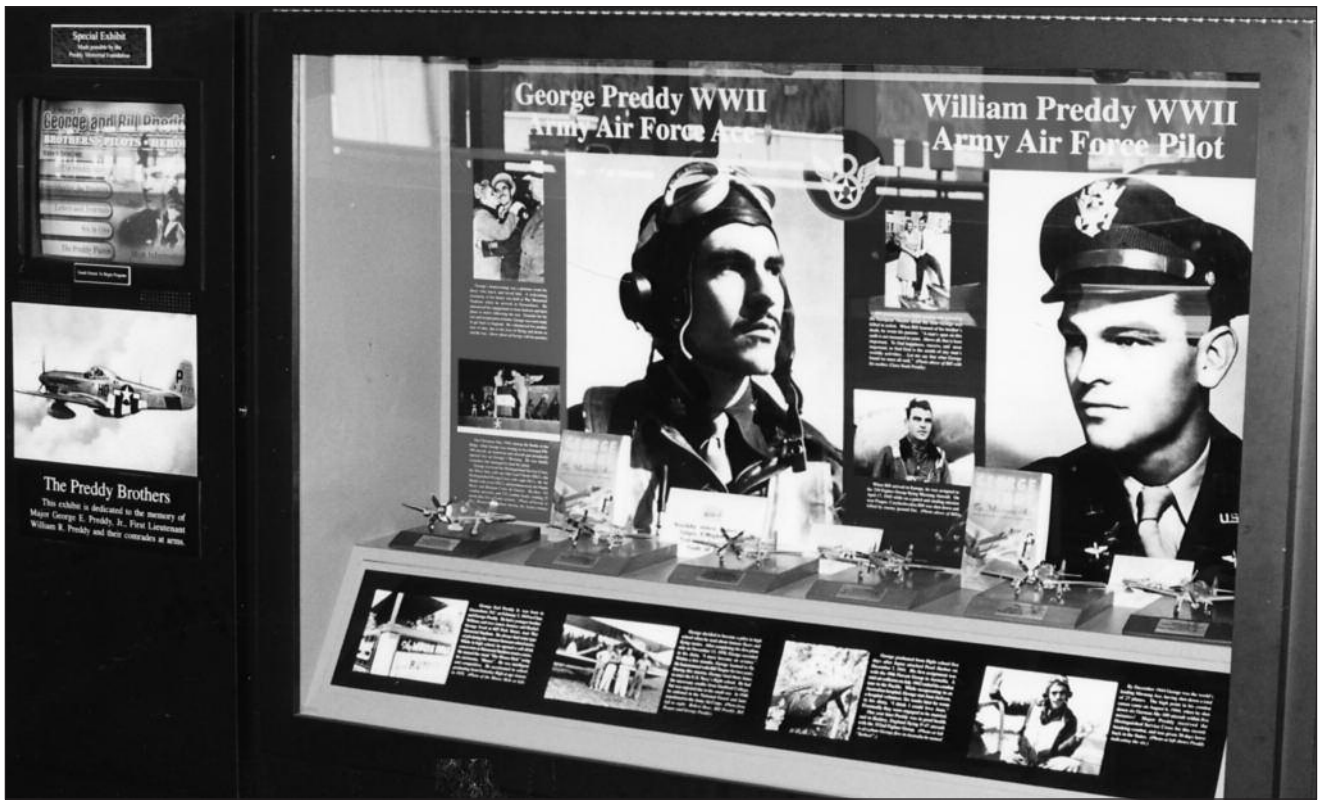
In December 1947 George Preddy Senior wrote to the Quartermaster General's office: 'When I filled out papers for Lieutenant William R. Preddy 02 057 681 I stated on his papers I would want Major George E. Preddy 0 430 846 body moved to be placed beside Lieutenant William R. Preddy in cemetery at St Avold, France. This my only request, and will appreciate it very much if you will advise if this will be done and let me know if and when it has been done, so I might have a record as to where the both of them are, as I expect to make a visit sometime in near future.' (Daniel Paulin)

ST AVOLD

George Preddy's remains were initially laid to rest at the American Military Cemetery at Margraten in the Netherlands. William Preddy was interred at the burial site near the Budejovice hospital in Czechoslovakia, but on July 28, 1945 his remains were moved to the US military cemetery at St Avold, France, situated some 25 miles east of Metz in the Lorraine district. Initially, William was placed in Plot L, Row 22, Grave 1693 but in 1947 the war graves section of the Quartermaster Corps received a request from Mr Preddy in the United States to have George's remains exhumed and re-interred at St Avold to be buried beside William. As a result, William was moved to a new location, the two permanent graves now being situated in Plot A, Row 21, Nos. 42 (William) and 43 (George).

Fate was indeed most cruel to the Preddy family for they had already experienced tragedy before the loss of both sons as their eldest daughter Jonnice had died in 1939 giving birth. During the war years it was a general belief among American civilians that fighter pilots were not subject to as much danger on missions as bomber crewmen, but the truth is that there was little difference in the overall loss rate. Moreover, fighter aircraft were particularly vulnerable to ground fire during low-level strafing, and during the last six months of Eighth Air Force operations three out of every four fighters lost to enemy action were brought down by flak.

We wish to acknowledge the help of Joe Noah and Sam Sox in the preparation of this article. For further reading we recommend their book George Preddy: Mustang Ace.



Visitors arriving at Greensboro airport are now greeted by this display funded by the Preddy Foundation.

AIRFIELD Y29
CONSTRUCTED IN 1944 BY
THE 852 ND ENGR. AVN. BN.
USED BY:
366 TH F.G. – 352 ND F.G.
125 TH WING 2ND T.A.F.
150 TH BELGIUM SQ. R.A.F.
406 TH F.G. – 391 ST B.G.
ZUTENDAAL JUNE 11 TH 1984